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An Illustrated History

# Special Services Group

1953-2015

Pakistan Army

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Of  
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# **ChapterI**

## **Historical Perspective of Special Forces**

Special Service Group of Pakistan Army traces its history and origin to the Cold War and a continuation of Great Game. Great Britain during its two hundred odd years of rule in India was embroiled in Russian phobia; in which Russia was perceived as the main enemy which can attack India . After Pakistan's independence in 1947, the international affairs were as such where world was divided into two camps the Capitalist and Communist; despite being allies in war the relationship between these two camps was at rock bottom , Korean War in 1948-49 further cemented this theme. Small countries which took birth after the WW2 were mainly aligned with either of the two blocks; Pakistan culturally, politically and ideologically was aligned with the Free World or USA. Founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah in his inaugural speech to constituent assembly did read a portion of the American president's letter felicitating on gaining independence. Military traditions and culture of newly born Dominion of Pakistan had the British military

traditions, organisation and culture embedded, majority of the officers in all three services including the chiefs were British officers , so was the military equipment , all training was undertaken at British military institutions in United Kingdom.

Pakistan is the modern name of the Indus Civilisation, military history of Indus Valley takes its birth from the campaigns of Alexander The Great in 323 BC, he was given stiff resistance in almost every major town of the valley , from Swat in north to the Mekran in south. Indus Valley was paying tribute to the Persians before the Greek invasion, Persians called it Hindu or Hind, for the reason that in Persian ‘S’ is represented by ‘H’, thus Sind became Hind. In later millennium the Indus Valley developed into two distinct halves, the upper or Northern valley and the Southern or lower valley. After Greeks came Sakans and later with the advent of Islam in 7<sup>th</sup> century , the mountainous region of the modern day Afghanistan {Ghazna-Ghor} by virtue of its military brilliance ruled India as far as modern day Bangladesh which was known as Bengal then. Between 1000-1500 AD, Slave Dynasty was ruling India, they had to face the Mongol wrath too. Mughul empire {1530-1857} was established by Babur of Ferghana, it extended from Kabul and beyond in west to Dacca and beyond in east. British East India Company{1600 AD} in later years expanded from a small trading post to an

all-conquering military giant, and by 1800 were the real king makers finally dethroning the last of Mughul emperor in 1857. It was the British which laid the modern foundation of the army regiments, culture, rank and organisation, later this military culture and might was divided among the two new dominions Pakistan and India in 1947.

British military culture is centred around *Esprit de Corps* {loyalty to regiment}, strict discipline with a liberal sprinkling of class distinction. Thus the interests of the regiment comes above everything even the national interest, discipline was strictly enforced with commanding officer having powers of life and death over soldiers, the officers were treated as a class apart in which the family lineage weighs more heavily than the competence. All in all a bureaucratic system of military organisation in which even a mundane issue can fill up volumes of files. Every act had to follow the tradition and convention ; logic took the second place in such system. The raising and induction of aircraft in British army is one such classic example. It was during the Boer War {1898-1900} that the term *Commando*<sup>1</sup> first appeared , it denotes the native white Afrikaans mostly German and Dutch, who had to arrange their own horse and weapon, wears no uniform and draw no pay. They

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Messenger *The Commandos 1940-1946* { London, Kimber,1985},p-17-19.



would strike with a lightning speed at the British troops and withdrew rather than engaging in a pitched battle. On a historical note, it were the Pathan tribes of North Western Frontier which in true sense can be termed as pioneer Commandos; they from 1849 onwards carried out successful hit and run operations against the British army units causing great damage to material and lives. In America, the USA Marines were authorised by the Congress in 1774, mainly to protect the ships, they were disbanded in 1784 and re-raised in 1794.

**Airborne.** Present day Special Forces are invariably linked with the air and sea, thus it is pertinent to have a brief history of aircraft and raising of air forces. Aircraft were used in First Great War primarily for artillery observation and correction of fire, subsequently parachute was invented and used. Parachute first employed in 1917 were mainly for the artillery observers. After the armistice, the utility of air forces were heatedly debated in which British Army resisted the raising of a new service, Royal Air Force{RAF} took birth in such environments. RAF thus historically emerged as the very first special force, meant to destroy the enemy by hitting it in the rear and deep at strategic targets. The inter great wars era in Europe's military thinking thus had the aircraft as the main threat and its destruction as the first priority of any strategy; airfields became the primary targets. Royal Navy also

contemplated on capturing the seaports through amphibious landings of own troops, thus Royal Marines took birth. British Army in 1938 had set up a branch headed by a major in War Office, for research on ‘irregular operations’<sup>2</sup>, this branch initially worked under general staff and later came under military intelligence staff.

On the onset of WWII, the belligerents {Britain, France and USA} had no clear cut policy on the employment of aircraft and the airborne troops. Germany on the contrary employed the paratroops in a bold, innovative and strategic manner . Adolf Hitler incorporated the concept of airborne troops as part of air force{Luftwaffe}, thus air force was not meant only to destroy the cities or support the army, it was to conduct independent operations where it will not only have the command of air but will also hold the ground by itself, it had integral troops, two airborne divisions. Some of the classic employment of airborne troops were. **Norway; 9<sup>th</sup> April 1940.** Norway was important for Germany because of its iron ore and the facility to attack the British fleet from air. But in the presence of Royal Fleet its capture by Germany was never given a serious thought by the Britain. The air assault and use of airborne troops by the Luftwaffe caught allies by surprise and Norway was captured by Germany despite

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p-18.

the presence of strong British naval fleet; rather forcing it to retrieve back to safe water . **Eben Emael; 10/11<sup>th</sup> May 1940.** The Belgium defence revolved around strategic complex of forts, of which Eben Email was the most formidable, and from German point of view their over all strategy of offense centred around its capitulation. One option was to destroy it from aerial bombing, but it was lengthy and not result oriented approach, thus Luftwaffe troops undercommand Lieutenant Wuttzing stormed it with gliders and captured it intact. The strategic result was overwhelming.

**Rotterdam; 14<sup>th</sup> May 1940.** Germany had 4500 parachute troops and 4000 were used in attack on Holland, they were backed up by a light infantry division consisting of 12000 men carried in transport aircraft, in the words of General Student ‘we dared not fail, for if we did the whole invasion would have failed’.<sup>3</sup>

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Ibid , p-73.

Major Geoffery Langlands, the oldest living commando. Major Langland is 98 years old, living in the Aitchison College, Lahore . He had taught in the same very school 1954-1979, later established the Razmak Cadet College in 1979, and Langlands School in Chitral in 1989. He was commissioned in British Army in 1939, and was among the pioneer irregular companies, he narrates ‘. ‘Training was tough, physically demanding, we were taught the use of explosives, with an aim to carryout commando raids on Germany’s occupying forces in Norway’ The said operation never took place and Lieutenant Langland was later transferred to India .

### **Commando Concept**

Britain had a wave of defeats in the WW2, much is attributed to its faulty system of military culture and warfare, both Royal Navy and RAF failed to live up to

the pre war much hyped capabilities. The defeats in summer of 1940 prompted Winston Churchill to write to War Office, to contemplate on employing troops in an unconventional manner in order to wrest this defeatist mentality which has set upon the British morale. Lieutenant Colonel Dudley Clarke in July 1940, wrote the very first military paper outlining the concept of *commando*. ‘ I think, suggested the name **Commando**, from the very onset’. The concept visualised , raising of irregular volunteers into Commandos, without any fixed establishment; arming ,organising and equipping the commando for hit and run operation not lasting more than 24 hours. The Commando in the initial days were volunteers, each command<sup>4</sup> would nominate one commando officer, who in turn would select his troop leaders and these troop leaders would pick the troops; thus each troop had ten commandos and each command in turn had approximately 100-150 troops designated as Commando. They were not housed in any army building neither provided with army ration , rather they were given cash and had to secure own food and lodgings. They would train on sea side and wait for task, which invariably involved crossing of English Channel and operating behind German forces in France for a short period and then evacuated. These commandos had no standard equipment, rather it was issued on the type of

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<sup>4</sup> In 1940,Britain or United Kingdom was divided into commands like eastern , southern etc etc .

mission. As the Commando missions involves navy and air force thus a joint coordination command was setup in Britain.

Beside the setbacks in mainland Europe, Great Britain suffered morale sapping retreats and defeats in Africa. African Campaign 1940, onwards provided the ideal playground for such innovative ideas. Long Range Desert Group was created to strike at the Field Marshall Rommel's advancing armour in Africa in 1941. It was, Lieutenant Sterling who, in search of adventure and in order 'to do something about the Germans' came up with an idea of **Special Air Service** {SAS}, a force comprising of small teams of four men, dropped behind Germans through parachute; inflicting damage which were primarily Luftwaffe aircraft<sup>5</sup>. This SAS carried out few operations with Long Range Desert Group, with partial success. Later the SAS was employed in Italy and France, two battalions were raised and in the end a brigade was formed; after the war the SAS was disbanded and reraised in 1950 at Malaya.

British also had to wage a long and tough war against the Japanese on the east in Burma, the pattern of the this war was no different from the Europe; British were on the retreat and morale had sapped to dangerous level. Field Marshall Slim was the commander, he had

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Geraghty *Who Dares Wins The story of Special Air Service 1950-1980* {Arms & armour, London, 1980}pp,2-11.

eighteen infantry divisions under his command. One of the highpoint of the campaign was the Brigadier Wingate's '**Chindits**' highly trained paratroopers meant to carry out infiltration and sabotage among the occupied and advancing Japanese army in Burma. An infantry brigade {111} was inserted in the jungle employing gliders and aircraft, later another brigade was also dropped through parachutes. The success was not much in terms of military gains but it at the minimum raised the morale of the troops. Field Marshal Slim, later wrote ' special forces are a waste of effort, the output does not match with the input that is given to special forces, these special forces are meant only for short period of time and then they have to be evacuated, moreover they create a sense in army, where it is believed that such and such operation can only be performed by special forces. Slim, further wrote, that there is nothing which an normal infantry cannot perform, it is only the paratroops which are an exception. Slim's final words , on special forces, reflects that there is a need to have special forces mainly for creating sabotage and assassination among the enemy, to create propaganda and acts like this.<sup>6</sup>

### **Para Regiment in India**

In 1943-44, Indian Para Regiment was formed comprising of four battalions, the 1<sup>st</sup> Para was all

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<sup>6</sup> Field Marshall William Slim *Defeat into Victory* {London, 1954}, pp, 515-546.

Hindus, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> were all Gurkha and 4<sup>th</sup> Para Battalion was all Muslims { the commanding officer was British}. These battalions comprised of all volunteer, and it was instructed by the higher headquarters that no officer or soldier will be stopped from forwarding his application to join the Para Battalions. However very few officers volunteered, mostly by those who have been posted out from their parent regiments to the other regiments. The Para training centre was established at Rawalpindi, 4th Para Battalion was stationed at Soan Camp and later move to the Ojhari. Present day Dhamial was one of the airfield constructed exclusively for Para training. Officers were initially tested in map reading and endurance, after one month of probation period the officers were finally selected for service with Para Regiment. The parachute training itself was conducted at Chaklala airfield by RAF sergeants, seven jumps were mandatory and there used to be only one parachute during jump; unlike American who were employing two parachutes during one jump. The Para Regiments had a liberal style of working in which paratroopers were allowed to have long bobbed hair style. There was no wing award ceremony rather an army order would be published allowing the officer or soldier who have completed the mandatory jumps to put on a wing on the right chest. In 4<sup>th</sup> Para Battalion as in other battalions, the commanding officer and second in command had no experience of para trooping. These Para battalions



played a very minor role during the war, as the war itself came to an end before these battalions could be matured. Captain Abu Bakr Osman Mitha {later major general, raised the Special Service Group} served in 4<sup>th</sup> Para Battalion. After the war, the Para Regiment was disbanded and instead, every third battalion of ten selected regiments were earmarked as Para Battalions and an airborne division was raised.<sup>7</sup>

### **Paratroops, Airborne, Guerrilla, Commando & Special Forces; 1950-2000**

By the end of the WW2, paratroops have become the key factor in achieving the surprise and paralysing the enemy, resultantly the Allies final assault was spearheaded by the paratroops and they emerged as the ultimate formation which can tilt the battle to winning side. The military culture of Britain, America and Germany had its impact on the overall concept, organisation and employment of paratroops or airborne forces. In Britain, from the moment the Royal Air Force took birth in 1917, the friction and tussle started between the army and newly born air force, to an extent where army accused air force on moral grounds. Thus till the end of the war, army and air force were embroiled over

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<sup>7</sup> Major General Abu Bakr Osman Mitha *Unlikely Beginnings, A Soldier's Life* {Oxford, Karachi, 2003}, pp, 87-102.

the control of the aircraft where army was desperate to have some control over the aircraft purely as its own; in the end Royal Air Observation Corps was formed which is today known as Army Aviation. In USA, during the WW2, army had the full control over the air as well, thus an independent air force in America took birth after the end of the war.

World military affairs in post WW2 were no different from the past, the world was as unsafe as it was in past; it was now divided into two distinct camps the west and the communist. Between 1947-1960, western military organisations were mainly focussed on the employment of small army units which are light, able to operate behind the enemy line, in hostile territory and carry out such operations along with the heavy use of fighter aircraft; events in Malaysia, Greece, Korea , Iran and Suez supplemented this theory. Countries and colonies became free from imperialism , mostly by employing guerrilla warfare, name like Mao Tse Tung and Che Guerra along with Ho Chi Minh, Yasser Arafat, became household. It was Vietnam which brought into limelight the use of helicopters and it changed the face of military operations. Now armies can insert and extricate the Special Forces which by end sixties had been divided into airborne and heliborne forces. The wave of terrorism took the world by surprise in early seventies where aircraft hijacking became a standard operation by

any terrorist organisation seeking world attention; the line between the revolution and terror became shrouded in ideology and politics.

The most daring act of Special Forces was the Entebbe raid by Israeli commandos in 1974, where they freed the hijack El Al aircraft, it is regarded at par in planning and execution with the raid to free Mussolini in 1944 by German commandos. American Green Berets failure in 1978 to free their embassy hostages in Iran again put a dark cloud on the utility of the special operation forces. United Kingdom employed SAS with some success in Falklands War. In the last quarter of last millennium, the focus of war shifted to urban area where handful of terrorist or political activists through use of violence crippled the political system of a country. Ireland , Cyprus are one such example, on the other hand the fiasco at Waco Texas {USA} in which over a hundred people were killed by the American forces in order to overcome the fundamentalist highlights the limitation of such forces. Thus special forces itself were compartmentalised into two distinct spheres, one dealing with such acts of violence within the country mostly hijacking and hostage taking, and other meant for action against the enemy forces in war.

Helicopters first introduced in 1948 during Korean War have brought a major change in military affairs. It was during decade long Vietnam War in which

the helicopters were employed for insertion behind the enemy and for extrication of own Special Forces. In early seventies the gunship helicopters were introduced {Cobra} and soon every major military power had the gunships in one variant or the other. Thus the Special Forces now revolved around having transport and attack helicopters; paratroopers and their insertion using fixed wing aircraft soon became obsolete.

Afghanistan between 1978-2000 and even now provides an ideal ground for the use and study of special forces employment both , in order to curb the insurgency and also as how to defeat a super power through the guerrilla warfare. Russian much feared Spetsnaz units failed to overcome the Mujahedeen's and in the end the very existence of Soviet Union was catalysed by the guerrilla warfare of native population. In the Afghanistan, the decade and half war on terror, in which Special Forces of USA, Britain, France and host of other countries have taken part, highlights the advantage which the native by virtue of his knowledge of area enjoys over the technology possessed by Special Forces.

Today the original Paratroopers are known with various nomenclature ranging from Air Assault, Air Borne, Guerrillas, Commandos, Heliborne and also collectively as Special Forces. Thus Special Forces today represents abstractly a small body of troops who as an individual or as a small team can operate underwater,

have snipers, demolition experts, can fly aircraft, ride horses and camel, surviving at their own for long period of time in isolation, for whom desert, mountain, urban and snow-capped peaks have no restrictions in carrying out the assigned missions. They are better paid and fed as compared to regular troops, allowed more freedom of action, not bounded by traditions and customs other than that of own, are more educated than ordinary soldier, physically they are trained to the maximum which a human can take and beyond. Their equipment is light and lethal, they are swift and loyal; and above all are expected to have less human emotions and liabilities as compared to conventional soldier and troops. In short the Special Forces are the elite of the elite; an ideal body of warriors.

## **Chapter II,**

### **The Evoloution of SSG 1950-1964**

Pakistan soon after independence found itself in a confrontation with both India and Afghanistan, with India; it was the refugees' problem, accession of states which included the Kashmir and Kalat, over and above the hatred that has been brewing for centuries between the two religions now became open. Afghanistan had the issue of legitimacy of the Durand Line.

General Douglas Gracey the last of the British ,Commander-in-Chief {C-in-C} of Pakistan Army 1949-1951, took keen interest in the Para abilities of army, he in 1949, detailed Major A.O.Mitha to carry out detailed survey of all ordinance depots in Pakistan to compile the stockpiles of parachuting equipment; there was not much in the stores. However the basic infrastructure was available in the forms of training facilities. The Indian Parachute Depot before partition was established at Rawalpindi. In the same time period the idea of raising a commando unit was first highlighted by Brigadier

Muhammad Yahya Khan{later President and C-in-C} who was serving in Military Training Directorate. Resultantly a Close Quarter Battle School was established in 1950, in Infantry School at Quetta under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Grant Taylor .

CQB School was meant to train the troops and officers in as the name suggests in close quarter battle techniques, however it was more oriented towards a proficiency in shooting with pistol and revolvers apart from imparting basic elementary training in explosives. ‘Grant was a fat man but an excellent shooter with pistol and revolvers, he would enter a room where there would be six targets, cut out of men, and in no time he would take all of them down, all his bullets passing through the heart of targets...he would in spare time just toss the bottles in air and shoot them in air, never missing even one bottle’.<sup>8</sup> Soon after the death of the Lieutenant Colonel Taylor, a Pakistan officer Lieutenant Colonel Ali Haider took over the command, Ali was commissioned in Indian Army in 1943, he was a police inspector before joining the army. In 1952, Lieutenant Colonel Ali Haider was sent for a commando course at England, he however failed to pass the course, main reason was his being old in age. The school was thus transferred to Attock Fort; later in 1952 the school was put in suspended animation. A year later the same

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<sup>8</sup> Mitha, *Unlikely Beginnings*.

institution was reorganised as **312 Garrison Company {Frontier Force}** under the command of Lieutenant Suleiman with Major Abu Bakr Osman Mitha , who was performing the duty of Grade Staff Officer {GSO-2} in General Headquarters, as the overall officer in charge for training and doctrine.

In 1954, Major Mitha after having undergone the Staff College at Quetta and having served as brigade major in an infantry brigade was posted back in Military Directorate; he was sent to England to undergo Senior Officers Course at Devizes. After the course he also had an attachment with Commando School and later underwent attachment with Royal marines and was trained as Frogman. Major Mitha had an interesting interaction with General Ayub Khan. One day Mitha was playing squash at present day Rawalpindi Club, he was a vocal player, ‘soon I saw the General Ayub standing on the gallery in sports dress, he was playing tennis in adjoining courts, he inquired ‘‘young man are you always so noisy in playing squash’’, I nodded in affirmative, he asked my name, and inquired about my grandfather Sir Suleiman Mitha whom he knew, few questions about my career and When I told him that I have been a paratrooper and taken part in few actions behind the Japanese in last war, he nodded in appreciation’ thus started a long professional relationship between Major Mitha and General Ayub Khan.



Pakistan was already a pro-western democratic country and in 1954 it formally joined the military alliances created by USA which included SEATO and CENTO. Resultantly Americans agreed to raise ‘Four and Half Divisions’ of army with the latest equipment along with aircraft for Pakistan Air Force. This force was meant to stop, retard and delay the perceived Russian or Communist invasion. For well over a century the policy of British India ‘Forward Policy’ was meant to stop the Russian invasion and after independence the same policy remained in place. Americans highlighted the fact that a special organization, an outfit, a unit is required to be raised which should be able to protect and retrieve downed pilots in the event of an Russian invasion, act as a nucleus around which guerrilla activities can be launched; around this cardinal point was raised the present day Special Service Group .

In May 1955, Deputy Chief of General Staff {DCGS} Brigadier Yahya Khan had a meeting with Lieutenant Colonel Don Bunte in which the idea of a ‘Stay Behind Unit’ was discussed. Later Lieutenant Colonel Mitha who was now the Inspector of Physical Training and also the Commandant of Physical Training School at Abbottabad was called to GHQ and had a meeting with Don Bunte. The American in the first stage was more interested in having a reconnaissance of entire Pakistan; thus Mitha and Bunte drove from Peshawar to

Quetta , from Quetta to Jiwani and back and later to Rawalpindi via Multan. After this month long reconnaissance Lieutenant Colonel went back to USA, he later wrote a paper on the utility of Stay Behind Activities Unit; he was able to convince his higher officials on the idea and as such by the end of the year he came back to Pakistan with his team of officers which included Captain Russ Taylor and Lieutenant Shoepe.

In Pakistan, Major Mitha was the natural choice and he was posted to 17<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment. This regiment was raised in 1942 at Karachi and in September 1955 it had arrived at Nowshehra from Bannu; where on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1955, Lieutenant Colonel Mitha took over the command<sup>9</sup>. It had been decided in principle to form the new ‘special’ unit around the nucleus of 17<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment. Choice of Baluch regiment was more due to the fact that Brigadier Yahya himself was commissioned and commanded a Baluch regiment; Yahya was one of the biggest supporter of the commando concept in Pakistan.

Another reconnaissance was undertaken for the selection of the ‘home and training base’ for the new regiment. The selection of a ‘home’ for this newly born force was a delicate issue, unlike other regiments, secrecy was the key factor for SSG, thus the sites

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<sup>9</sup> *History of Baluch Regiment*, papers sent by 19<sup>th</sup> Baluch to the centre, SSG Archives, Tarbela.

initially reconnoitred included Fort Munro, Khan Pur, Razmak, Wanna Chaman, Hamsherian, Kakul, Attock and Cherat; in the end Attock Fort and Cherat were chosen as the home station and training centre; there could not have been a better choice than these.

## **Raising and Organisation of SSG**

### **19<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment**

By the end December 1955, the 17<sup>th</sup> Baluch had returned all its surplus equipment, weapons and ammunition. The present strength of the battalion were given the option of serving in the new role as volunteer provided they pass the physical tests; Selection standards were high that only one company of 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion the Baluch Regiment was retained, more for administrative purpose than for actual operation or training. 312 Garrison Company (Special Service Group) after undergoing the tests, only volunteers were retained. Major Shariff, Captain Riaz were retained from the Baluch Regiment where as Lieutenant Saleem Zia who was Mitha's adjutant at PT School also volunteered and was appointed as adjutant. He in later years rose to the rank of brigadier and commanded the SSG, he was also

among a handful of officers of Pakistan Army who were qualified both as commando and an aviator.

On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1956, part of battalion including the headquarters moved to Cherat and on 14<sup>th</sup> February the remaining segment of the battalion arrived at Attock Fort. Simultaneously recruiting parties including the commanding officer went on a tour of regimental centres and various stations to select the volunteers from all arms and services. A new company was thus raised from these new volunteers, This company was the first company of the Special Service Group and was named as 'A Company'. Major Gadeen Khan Abdullai was the first Company Commander and he had Captain R. B. Baluch, Captain Muhammad Suleiman Khan and Captain Abdul Shakur Jan as his platoon commanders

Lieutenant Colonel Mitha on the raising of SSG was called personally by General Ayub Khan discussed the very character of the new unit ; General Ayub Khan placed the unit directly under his own command and instructed Lieutenant Colonel Mitha to report directly to him or to Brigadier Yahya for any administrative issue. It was customary, that whenever lieutenant colonel Mitha would be in GHQ he had to inform the military secretary to the commander in chief about his presence in the headquarters. The SSG was a top secret unit thus

majority of the paper work were burnt after reading and instructions were passed verbally. No officer from regular army no matter what the rank is, could not visit Cherat without the permission from GHQ.

In March 1956, Mitha was advised by the American team to have a visit of American training institutions , thus Mitha spent over six weeks in USA. He was taken around different organisations and briefed by Central Intelligence Agency{CIA} staff as well. He was given preliminary training in guerrilla warfare concept, taken to Fort Bragg to undergo parachute training, Americans were using two parachutes during the jump. Later few days of frogman training, Americans were having the compressed gas and as such they were diving down to hundred feet. A short but useful stay at the mountain training school was the culmination point of Lieutenant Colonel's Mitha's tour and training. More than anything else, it gave an insight into American way of life and culture. As Major General Mitha later wrote in his autobiography, ' I had first interaction with American army and soldiers in Burma, at that time they looked a bunch of undisciplined and sex maniac uniform personals...during my stay at USA, I Found them highly disciplined and adhering to strict protocol among themselves...they had a notion of that everything which is American as to be the best and must be applied across

the globe...by and large the majority of Americans are ignorant about the world'.<sup>10</sup>

The induction of men and officers was a meticulous system, Mitha and his officers visited the centres and selected men who had very abinitio training, the reason given by the Mitha was that, he wanted to have men who have not yet polluted by the ceremonial aspect of regular army. Similarly in case of officers, the main emphasis apart from the physical fitness was the honesty and integrity. Any one found even giving a hint of disclosing the facts was sent home packing; usually before the lunch was even consumed. Men and officers were made aware of the fact that they will not share anything regarding the SSG with anyone, although they were encouraged to enlist men whom they know and trust.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1956, the nomenclature of the battalion was changed into 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion Baluch Regiment {SSG}; it was in 1964 that it was modified into 19<sup>th</sup> {Para} Battalion the Baluch Regiment {SSG}. Initially the 19<sup>th</sup> Baluch had the standard infantry organisation, having four companies and a headquarters company, however in new role Lieutenant Colonel Mitha organised it into three wings namely the administrative, training and operation wings;. Lieutenant Colonel Mitha

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<sup>10</sup> Mitha *Unlikely Beginnings*, pp

remained in command from September 1955 – June 1961. Major Aslam {Military Cross} was his second in command, Captain Ghulam Muhammad as adjutant, Captain Muhammad Riaz as quartermaster, station staff officer was Captain Saleem Zia. There were three companies namely A, E and I{Signal company}. Major Gaiden Khan and Captain Shakoor Jan in A Company, Captain Saeed Nawaz, Captain Azam Khattak{E Company} Captain Sindhu in I Company. Other officers who joined in this period included Major Shuaib, Major R.B. Baluch, Captain Akram, Captain Imtiaz, Captain Suleiman and Captain Mahmood Kamal. In GHQ, Major Shariff was the officer dealing with the affairs of the SSG , which was included as part of infantry directorate{Infantry-8}.

Captain Mahmood Kamal raised the M company in 1958-59, Mahmood was from Guides Cavalry, this company was known as the Frogman company, with the task of operating underwater, providing support not only to own battalion but also to Pakistan Navy as well, it was initially stationed at Mangla and later moved to Karachi. Captain Mahmood underwent courses at USA alongwith handful of soldiers. Captain Hakim Arshad Qureshi{later major general} was the other officer selected for the frogman company, he did not knew swimming and as such was reluctant to join it, Lieutenant Colonel Mitha , consoled him and said' I am not picking you up for

swimming but for drowning’ ; later Captain Hakim went on to command the company as well.<sup>11</sup> SSG officers were not wearing regular army uniform, they were authorised to drive vehicles which had civilian number plates and they were authorised to drive army vehicles as well , this caused many a delicate scenes in which field formations wrote letters against the SSG officers but every time the reply was that it is authorised by army chief. Later an authority letter was issued by GHQ but only to SSG, which as and when required basis was sent to the concerned formations.

The newly raised SSG was keenly observed by the senior officers of Pakistan Army{Pakarmy}, Brigadier Yahya Khan as DCGS{deputy chief of general staff} visited it on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1956, he again visited the unit on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1958 as CGS{chief of general staff}. Brigadier Syed Peerzada as DMO{director military operations} inspected the unit on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1959. Field Marshall Ayub Khan twice visited the battalion, first on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1956 and then on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1957 when he was accompanied by the CGS Major General Habib Ullah Khan.. Commander in Chief General Musa Khan was among the SSG troops on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1959; he was taken around the training and shown the hideout drills. General Musa observed a commando cooking

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<sup>11</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Ghulam Gilani, *SSG Tareekh Kay Ainay Mein*, {SSG Headquarters, 2003}.pp,12-36.



frogs , and he inquired about it, General remarked to the extent that it is more of a showpiece arranged for him. The soldier promptly replied in negative and Commander in Chief made a statement that if he will also eat the frog, if the soldiers are eating it, ‘ the soldier cooked few frogs and ate them in front of General Musa, I must give credit to General Musa as he kept his words, I do not know whether he ate it or gulped it but he took one frog and simple swallowed it’.<sup>12</sup>

**Training.** The training of the SSG in the initial days was primarily focussed on physical fitness, American instructors taught about the menace of communism. Essays and articles translated from French formed the core component of the indoctrination, ‘What is Revoluntary Warfare’ was a first choice of literature in which Viet Minh, Communist Insurrection in Greece and Iranian Tudeh were taught. Later in the course counter resistance measures was taught in second week, demolition constituted a four hours of teaching, improvised firing techniques, fuses, air operations, ambush, and psychological warfare were other key ingredients of the training. Clandestine operation consumed 160 hours of the training, escape and evasion took 16 hours and fieldcraft another 30 hours.<sup>13</sup> The officers after completing their training were posted to the

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<sup>12</sup> Mitha *Unlikely Beginnings* , pp,200-226

<sup>13</sup> SSG Archives, Tarbela.

companies composed of newly selected men and were made responsible for their training. Platoons were trained by the officers for three months, after which the platoons were given tasks , like raid and ambush . Companies also trained in similar fashion, a company would be sent on leave collectively after undergoing the training cycle.<sup>14</sup>

*At the 'H' Company office Captain Manto, Guides Cavalry, 6<sup>th</sup> PMA Course, from the first parade to the game parade I was to move at the double when going from one place to another, that every morning there would be PT except on Saturday, that on Wednesday there would be five mile run with the '80' pack, on Saturday there would be a fifteen miles routes march with full' field service marching order' and every evening, except Saturday there would be games, Captain Manto then me in his jeep a little distance on a track leading out of Cherat and indicated an area about three hundred feet below the road level and told me that it was my training area.*

*Next I was introduced to the platoon that I was to train and in the process, get my own training. The men were volunteers and had been selected from all over the army, the incentive were the monetary allowance, certain deviations from the time honored army routines*

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<sup>14</sup> For more about early training , see Brigadier Zaheer Khan's *The Way It Was* { Army Book Club, 2000}, Chapter III.

*and methods such as no roll calls. The men did not march in bodies to their place of duty and the most appreciated privilege was of being allowed to proceed on weekend leave by signing out and signing in on return. There were about forty men in the platoon, for some reason there was no Junior Commissioned Officer or a havildar, the senior most NCO was Naik, I appointed him as the platoon havildar and my second in command, and appointed other NCOs, according to their seniority, in charge of sections.*

The training started with basic fieldcraft training and night training stalking, this followed by patrolling, then selection and occupation or hideouts. Night training would start about eight o'clock at night, continue till about three o'clock in the morning and the next morning would be off till eleven.

*The Cherat hills were very steep, covered with wild olive bushes and were full of snakes, vipers around Cherat and Kraits in the foot hills. In one stalking exercise at night I was going down-hill, holding bushes and feeling for foot holds, and while I was hanging from a bushes snake went over my chest touching my neck and I could feel it passing over me.*

*In the selection and occupation of hideouts, I was told to move my platoon to within a given area and hide there for three days, cooking our own food and the*

*“Demonstration Company’ who acted as the enemy in exercises, would search for us. If an officer got caught by the enemy he had to pay a fine to the ‘Demo Company’ men a chit was signed and handed over to whoever was the commander and the amount was charged in the mess bill, besides this the ‘ Demo Company’ men would dance a bhangra around the officer. We moved out of Cherat in the evening with all the things that we thought would be necessary, early in the morning we stopped in an considered safe, when the sun camp up we found that the area was open and we could be seen from miles around and decided to have our morning meal and move out, Captain Jaffar Shah, Corps of Engineers, later lieutenant Colonel, was my umpire, we were sitting side by side when a small little krait snake came and started striking at Jaffer shah’s boot toe. I noticed it first and was watching it repeatedly striking the toe of Jaffer Shah’s boot when Jaffer Shah noticed me starting at his boot, he looked down, saw the snake about to strike him and made the most spectacular jump backward from a setting position. On this exercise the Demo Company found our hide-out but they did not find me. I hid a nullah bed when the attack alarm went. In the next exercise of this kind that we went out, we shed a lot of things that we had taken on the first outing, each individual worked out what his necessities were on an exercise and made his own arrangements. Weapons,*

*communication equipment etc had to be carried according to the assigned mission.*

*As the training progressed, the number of men decreased every week, most of them quitting because they found that they did not have the physical endurance required. When I started the training, I did not own a pair of army boots because in the Armoured Corps we mostly wore rubber-soled shoes. I had not been on a route march after leaving the PMA, on the first route march I wore a pair of half Wellingtons and my feet blistered, I then brought a pair of army boots. Broke them in and got used to wearing army boots again.*

When they had completed three months training, all platoons were given a test exercise, Captain Zaheer was given the demolition of a bridge located on the Grand Trunk Road near the Kamra airfield. He was called from the game parade in the evening and given the mission, the only information given was that the bridge over the Indus was guarded. *I assembled my platoon, briefed them and we moved out after having the evening meal, after marching all night we stopped about five miles from the Attock road cum rail bridge. I sent scouts to check how the bridge was guarded and to explore the availability of boots. My scouts returned and reported that all trucks were being stopped and searched and that the river was in high floods with no boats available. Since no vehicular traffic was permitted floods with no over*

*the Attock bridge, my only alternative was the railway. We moved to the Khairabad railways station and waited for a train to stop, late at night a goods train stopped, I went to the locomotive and talked the driver into stopping at the Attock station across the bridge, this way we the Indus. 'E' Company located at Attock Fort, was to act as our enemy and Captain Mirza Aslam Beg, later general and Chief of Army Staff, was to act our umpire, After the umpire Joined us and we had given map reference of our out a reconnaissance of the bridge, and we attacked. The attack was deemed successful and I was ordered by Lieutenant Colonel Mitha to report back at Cherat. We were not stopped to move during the day but calculating summed I marched the platoon towards Cherat hoping to reach the foothills on Cherat in daylight. On the way my platoon was ambushed, after we scattered the enemy started shouting and asking us to stop running. Cautiously we contacted the men who had ambushed us and found it was a platoon of '11' Company, also on a test exercise like us, and had ambushed us as joke, Captain Hamayun Malik , 6 Lancers, later brigadier, was the platoon commander and he remained me innumerable time about this ambush. After the ambush both the platoons marched together, all night we could see the red light over the PAF radio antenna in Cherat, all night it seemed around the next bend but we only reached it when dawn was breaking.*

Companies were trained to operate in the mountains during summer and winter with special equipment. The area they normally went to for training was in Swat beyond Kalam, the road to which was very bad in those days and where nobody else went. The only accommodation was a two-roomed rest house. In winter and summer the company including the officers lived in the special two-man tents. Major General Mitha later wrote, *Mountain warfare was nothing new to us, but winter combined with snow warfare was, and had to train ourselves, which we did.*

One company was sent to East Pakistan to train, be able to operate in the monsoon and in the dry weather. Another company was trained in desert warfare, and another company was trained for fighting in towns. These companies were not trained for regular warfare in these areas, but in how to organize and carry out guerrilla warfare.

Once the two months of initial training was completed. The officers and men were posted to companies. After the first two intake had been, all other companies were trained by the company commanders and Lieutenant Colonel Mitha tested them when they had finished their initial training. Every man was trained

in basic demolition, to drive a vehicle in case of emergency, in advanced map reading and navigation, to operate a wireless set in an emergency, Morse Code, rock climbing, swimming, first aid, and unarmed combat. After this phase of training was finished, the men had to specialize in two of the trades, thus every group had a specialist in each of the trades. The officers were given advanced training in target analysis. *A very important subject as without this it was impossible to do any job with small groups, which was the whole aim of a unit like the SSG. As I have said, great emphasis continued to be given to night training and physical fitness.* Wrote Lieutenant Colonel Mitha almost forty years after he conducted the training

Every companies in Cherat had to jog downhill two miles to Chapri check-post and back every week, and each man had to carry 40 lb, in his pack. The companies in Attock did not do this because there were no suitable hills nearby, but they had their turn when they came to Cherat in the normal process of rotation of the companies between Cherat and Attock. Every four months each company had to do a thirty-six mile test which had to be completed in nine hours. Every man had to carry his weapon and pouch ammunition and 40 lb. in his pack.

When all twelve companies had been raised, the group did a hundred miles on an individual basis. The



men carried no weapons or packs and water points were installed at frequent intervals. Langars were also set up at various places.

### **100 Miles March- (1960)**

Ssg set the physical standards in Pakistan Army, a 100 miles marching competition among the Ssg companies was conducted on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1960 . It comprised of non stop marching, over 20 miles of track, 40 miles on cross country, 25 miles over a metallic road and in the end the 15 miles walk to reach the Cherat ; which invariably involves a climb from 1500 feet to 4300 feet. All in all 57 officers and men were able to do it within 29 hours. The best average time was returned by the G Company having 31 hours and 4 minutes and was declared the champion. Best timing was achieved by Naik{No 3031362} Ghulam Miran who completed the distance in 21 hours and 58 mins; he was 38 years old. Captain Syed Ahmad completed the distance in 25 hours and 14 mins and thus achieved the best time amongst the officers. Jemadar {PJO 31613} Inayat Ullah of G Company was overall second, his timings were 26 hours and 39 minutes; he was 39 years old.

This march was a sensation at that time, it highlighted the physical prowess of SSG to the entire army and nation; Naik Ghulam Miran was awarded Tamgha –I- Imtiaz for his feat, which was considered a world record at that time.

### **Tirch Mir and SSG -1961**

Pakistan is blessed with the three highest mountain ranges in the world namely Karakorum, Himalaya and Hindukush, five peaks over 8000 meters are among these ranges. In the early sixties, SSG took over the mantle of setting the physical and adventure training spirit among the army and country. Tirch Mir {25000 feet} is the highest peak in Hindukush located at the western most extremities of Chitral; overlooking the Afghanistan. In August 1961, a eight member SSG mountaineering expedition team led by Major{PA 4058} Nishat Ahmed attempted to scale it, it fell short of the peak yet the very fact that it was the highest altitude which was reached by any Pakistani army unit then, made the headlines. Team was commended for its efforts and all members were awarded with C-in-C commendation cards. This romance with mountains continued in coming years.

### **Bajaur- Dir Operation**

The very first operational employment of the SSG took place in September 1960, Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan had reached their lowest ebb, Afghans started instigating frontier fiefdoms on rebellion. Area north of Peshawar was an amalgamation of princely state of Swat and Chitral whereas the Dir was sandwiched between these two ; Bajaur on the other hand was an extension of tribal chieftainship. Both Bajaur and Dir were playing the role of puppets in the hands of Afghanistan , thus it was pertinent to influence a change of rulers. Since the reports from various agencies were not only sketchy but at times confusing as well, so the Special Service Group (SSG) was tasked to send a team in disguise, to assess the real ground situation. On 18<sup>th</sup> September 1960, Lieutenant Colonel Mitha , briefed Captain Abdur Rauf on the overall situation . For the purpose Captain Rauf along with Havildar Sikander {A Company} proceeded to the region in the guise of local inhabitants. From Chakdara onward they were to cover the area on foot while carrying the required stores and communication equipment on donkeys to look like the ordinary folks of the area. However, after some time the communication was totally lost which created some panic in the concerned quarters. An urgent message was sent from SSG to despatch aircraft next morning to Peshawar for search mission. For the purpose Captain Mushtaq Madni

and Captain A R Kallue (both retired as Lieutenant Colonels) were nominated. Captain Kallue was selected for the mission as he was a good friend of Captain Rauf and could recognize him from some distance. From Peshawar, the pilots flew to Malakand and via Chakdara followed the only road leading to Khar area. Couple of miles short of Khar village, the group with two donkeys was spotted. Low passes were made and Captain Rauf was recognized by Captain Kallue without any doubt. Later Captain Rauf reached back Peshawar safely with the desired information.

## Dir

Dir State operation took place on the heel of success in Bajaur, on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1960, Major S.Manto was busy with his company at the firing range when he got the message to immediately report at commanding officer's office. Lieutenant Colonel Mitha briefed Major Manto, ' select 20 men , and be ready to move out of Cherat by 1730 hours...you have to reach Chitral by tomorrow and subsequently to undertake a mission in support of 7 Division for the overthrow of Nawab of Dir...you will be wearing the militia uniform , which you will collect from Balahisar Fort... I will join you at the Peshawar airfield next morning'. Major Manto

took Lieutenant Fakher and his men along with required maps and equipment and promptly departed Cherat at given time. Next morning {29<sup>th</sup> September 1960} the force took off from Peshawar and arrived at Chitral airfield in two Dakotas. Pakistan Air Force had attached an aircrew exclusively for the SSG and it was the same crew which took the force to Chitral.

At that time Chitral Scouts had their headquarters at Drosh Fort which is thirty odd miles east of Chitral city. Lieutenant Colonel Gulsher the commandant of Chitral Scouts further briefed the SSG contingent on the local politics and general layout of the operation. Two battalions of Frontier Corps namely I & II Mahsud Battalions were also part of the force along with Chitral Scouts. The information about the Dir city itself was scant, Military Intelligence had reported about the possession of eight 6 Pounder artillery gun and close to 5000 troops in Nawab's arsenal. The plan given by intelligence which involved burning of the Dir city itself was rejected by the Lieutenant Colonel Mitha , basing upon his own conviction ; later a modified plan was agreed upon. SSG in the coming days carried out reconnaissance of the area, furthermore as a guise and cover story, they move to Mirkani Fort, a further ten odd miles east of Drosh Fort, where they trained the Mahsud Battalions . A further reinforcement of SSG, one platoon ex G Company under Major Nishat arrived at Mirkani.

On 8<sup>th</sup> October 1960, the SSG move out from Mirkani and reached Ziarat, a platoon size post of Chitral Scouts at Lowari Top; Brigadier Shariff the designated force commander also joined the contingent. An hour before the schedule launching of the operation, the whole operation was put off till the final orders of go ahead from GHQ; they finally got the message late at night thus operation commenced next morning. At first light on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1960, SSG was in position around the Dir city, pair of Pakistan Airforce aircraft also appeared on horizon, they made low passes over the city, dropped the leaflets asking for surrender of Nawab of Dir. The nawab himself made a last minute attempt to arouse his people, he was also banking upon armed help from Afghan Lashkar, Nawab's party was ambushed by the SSG and with this his last hope and will was broken. Later he was taken in a helicopter accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Mitha to Lahore. Nawab's son Khusro was made the new nawab and situation returned to normalcy, the information about artillery pieces turned out to be an imagination.

### **High Alerts – April - September 1961.**

The very first alert for SSG in relation to its proposed and designated tasks came in April 1961, when

GHQ as a precaution , keeping in view the relations with India, put SSG on high alert. Lieutenant Colonel Aslam, MC , called the conference of all company commanders {A,E,J,H} other companies K was performing the administrative duty and G was in Gilgit for survey. The SSG remained on high alert for fifteen days and it was only on the last day of April that they received ‘stand down’ orders. The major weakness that was observed during this high alert was the lack of a mobility plan and the unsatisfactory state of military transport; over and above the realisation of lacking airborne capability was acutely felt.

Another high alert came on 23<sup>rd</sup> September same year but this time, it was Afghanistan which caused it. Captain Khursheed Ghias Ahmad was sent to Arandu{Chitral} with command of a platoon{G Company}. The force was attired in militia dress, they arrived at Chitral in Dakota and from Chitral city they drove to Drosh onwards to Arandu. The last ten miles had to be trekked on foot as it was unfit for any vehicular movement. Arandu is a frontier post, a junction of Chitral River and Bashgall Nullah, the boundary line is thirty yards ahead of own post; on opposite side Birkot Fort was under repair . Own SSG collected information about the area mainly from smugglers which invariably were double agents; Afghans used to call this force as Lawanna {mad} as narrated by the smugglers, mainly

for the reason that these SSG were seen roaming at day and night over the mountains and in the nullahs. In November , Captain S.A. Durrani replaced Captain Khursheed , in April 1962 the SSG returned to home base.

### **SSG and Nagas**

The tensions on eastern and western borders were mainly due to India's intervention and backing; thus when the opportunity arise in 1962 to pay back her in same currency, it was grabbed. Nagaland is the easternmost territory of India encompassing seventeen different tribes, mainly Christians. Nagas from 1947 had a troubled relationship with India, it was in May 1962 that Mr Phizo the guerrilla leader of insurgency requested Pakistan for military assistance and training; in the background of the India's conduct in recent past , it was agreed to provide Nagas with assistance.

In July 1962, a five member SSG training team led by Major Masood Kamal alongwith Captain Khalid Musharraf, Subedar Zardad and Havildars Allah Ditta and Allah Din arrived in Dacca from Cherat. The team established a training camp , rather it would be more appropriate to call it a hideout near Kumbhi {Sylhet}. Nagas strength was around 150, having a fair number of women as part of them. Training concentrated on map



reading, patrolling, hideout, ambush, raid and basic techniques of explosives and demolition. Language was a major barrier in training as these Nagas spoke three different languages thus there were three interpreters, training area itself was small. Nagas were an excellent breed of fighters, simple in nature, religious and physically very tough; men and women carried 80-100 pounds of weight over 25-30 miles of jungle tracks during training. They all were volunteers, and had trekked over five hundred miles to learn the fine art of fighting in order to repulse the Indian aggression in their area. In September 1962, Captain Kazam Kamal replaced Captain Musharraf as the training officer incharge. In March 1963, the training was concluded and the camp wind down with the SSG team returning back to home base enriched with the art of jungle warfare .

### **Change of Command (1962)**

Lieutenant Colonel Abu Bakar Osman Mitha on promotion was posted out and Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Aslam, MC took-over the command on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1962. It was a momentous moment in every sense, Mitha had attained a mythical status in the army and within SSG he was loved and feared at the same time. On his posting the digest of service records ‘ The month

of June was marked with farewell parties and qawwalis in the honour of outgoing commanding officer'.<sup>15</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Aslam as his successor was a very wise step, it helped in the continuity of the Scarlet Thread around which the SSG took birth and Aslam had been among the pioneer officer of SSG. Having been the Second in Command with Lieutenant Colonel Abu Bakar Osman Mitha, thus he had no difficulty in maintaining the same tempo and culture of SSG.

Lieutenant Colonel A.O. Mitha was born on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1923 in Bombay, commissioned in 2/4 Bombay Grenadiers in 1942, a veteran of Burma campaign, he served in 14/7 Rajputana Rifles, later he was among the pioneer Muslim officers to undergo Parachute training and he served in 4<sup>th</sup> Para Battalion. He also served in 1/8 Punjab regiment and commanded 9/8 Punjab Regiment. A graduate from Command and Staff College Quetta and later served as brigade major in 105 Brigade. He was the pioneer officer of SSG and commanded 19<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment for six years. Major General Mitha, later served as Colonel Staff 10 Infantry Division, Commandant of Baluch Regimental Centre at Abbottabad, commanded an independent brigade at Commilla in East Pakistan during 1965 War, Commandant Pakistan Military Academy, General Officer Commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division at Multan

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<sup>15</sup> SSG Archives, Tarbela.

and his last posting was Quarter Master General {QMG} in GHQ during the 1971 War; after which he was retired prematurely for 'no fault of officer'. Major General Mitha took his last breath in Rawalpindi on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1999; he was given the ceremonial burial by a squad of SSG and officers of the group paid last respect to the man who laid and nurtured the SSG.

Major General Mitha was popularly known as 'Aboo', he was fond of reading, especially the history and philosophy, preferred classic music, remained physically fit throughout his life, an excellent Squash player and a keen sportsman. He had seen many ups and down in his career, for the reason that all his and his wife Indu Mitha's family were in India. Aboo himself and his wife belonged to well to do families in India, but Mitha out of sheer love for the profession of army preferred Pakistan. Major General Mitha wrote two books, namely *Fallacies and Realities* in 1993 and an autobiography *Unlikely Beginnings* which was published posthumously in 2003. As a mark of respect, a company in Special Service Group is named after him 'Mitha Company'. Also the main chowk in Cherat, is named after him.

## **National Standard Presentation**

National Standard is the biggest honour which any battalion, not only in Pakistan but world over strives; to be presented with. It thus becomes the honour of the battalion, in Islamic military traditions the flag or Alm has a very special place. 30<sup>th</sup> May 1962, is milestone date in the history of SSG, on this day, Commander in Chief of Pakistan Army presented the National Standard to the 19<sup>th</sup> {Para} Battalion, The Baluch Regiment {Special Services Group} at Cherat.

## **Exercise ‘Joint Train’ and ‘Tayyyar’ 1962-1963.**

Exercise ‘Joint Train’ was conducted from 30<sup>th</sup> September to 26<sup>th</sup> October 1962 in area Manshehra Valley. A team of American Special Forces took part in the exercise. The exercise was planned to practice, organized and conduct raids and ambushes in ‘enemy’ occupied area. During this exercise Special Forces both American and Pakistan were parachuted into the ‘enemy’ territory. This was the first para jump in Pakistan after partition. The Drop Zone was in area Manshehra. Another exercise Tayyar was conducted in May-June 1963. From early 1961 after SSG had raised and

trained 12 companies, it was felt that the present organization of the Special Service Group was becoming unwieldy due to expansion, operations and training commitment not only in West Pakistan but also in East Pakistan. An outline organization was worked out to make independent wings both in West and East Pakistan with headquarter in Cherat to be commanded by a colonel /brigadier. To demonstrate the operational capability of Special Service Group a large scale exercise was designed by General Headquarters. The exercise was named **“Tayyar”**. This exercise was attended by the then Chief in Command General Muhammad Musa, Chief of General Staff, principal staff officers, and all the division commanders. Colonel Abu Bakar Osman Mitha who was commanding Baluch Regiment Centre at that time was the director of the exercise. All the pioneer officers of Special Service Group were called for umpiring the sub units during the exercise. The area of exercise expanded from Manshehra to Hyderabad a distance of over 500 miles. This exercise proved very successful in presenting the capabilities and the limitations of the Special Service Group in various operation fields.

## Chapter III

### **Special Service Group & Wars of 1965 -1971**

1965 is a milestone in Pakistan's history, despite numerically outnumbered by Indian military, own defence forces not only blunted the Indian attack on 6<sup>th</sup> September, but also captured more territory when the ceasefire was agreed on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1965. A war is not judged purely on the area and casualties suffered or inflicted rather the impact of war on the morale of the nation is what matters in the end. In 1965, Pakistan military aggressively took Indians head on; the root cause was Kashmir. The year had started in a peaceful manner but the decade old boundary disputes in Rann of Kutch ignited the buried animosity among two rival and opposing ideologies.

Rann of Kutch {April- May 1965} was a limited act of violence in terms of troops and duration, at the end both countries agreed to resolve the issue by appointing an arbitrary commission. SSG did not participated in the action however it is worth mentioning that SSG had a

plan to destroy Dwarka; the major Indian Naval base in the area.

## **Ranger Battalions**

In July 1965, the nomenclature of the SSG was change into Rangers Wings. Thus the old 19<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment was reverted back to army and instead the manpower retained was divided into three wings, known as No.1 Ranger Battalion, No. 2 Ranger Battalion and a new unit was raised as No.3 Rangers Battalion. Among these three Rangers battalions, the No.3 Rangers was raised in East Pakistan and placed undercommand of 14 Infantry Division. The SSG was now modelled and organised as an independent group equivalent to an infantry brigade. Thus staff appointments like grade II for training and operations were created and filled. A deputy commander post was also created, for administrative purposes the appointment of quartermasters and staff officers were incorporated in the table of organisation and equipment. No.1 Ranger Battalion was stationed at Cherat and No.2 Rangers Battalion at Attock. This change over was initiated in the first week of July and lasted till the end of August, the complete property and equipment had to be distributed among the two Ranger Battalions; all in all there were 348 files heads which needs to be distributed among these two. This exercise took a heavy toll on the training

and planning of the upcoming operations, as considerable time was spent on this transition. Later in 1966, the nomenclature of Rangers was dropped and instead Commando Battalions was adopted which is lasting till now.

### **Operation Gibraltar**

After the Rann Of Kutch embarrassment, Indians adopted an aggressive posture towards Pakistan, threatening to open a front of their own choice. Pakistan, morally, emotionally, politically had been supporting the freedom movement in Kashmir. Above everything else, Kashmir was and is, the pivot of Pakistan's military strategy. From early sixties {1963}, under the Mr Zulfiqar Bhutto then foreign minister, a Kashmir cell was raised to keep the issue alive. Officers and men from SSG were deputed to establish training camps for the freedom fighters in Azad Kashmir. In line with the military thinking of that era, it was conceived and planned to raise a guerrilla force comprising of Kashmir freedom fighters, trained by own SSG , later led into Indian held Kashmir to carryout sabotage activities to an extent that the local population themselves stand up and force the Indians to abide by the united Nations resolution which calls for a plebiscite in valley. A near perfect plan, which by all accounts and rationality was deemed to be a success.



12 Infantry Division under Major General Akhtar Malik was made responsible for the operation, he presented his plan **Operation Gibraltar** to President Ayub Khan and senior army commanders, on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1965' plan was approved. The plan envisaged infiltration by small groups into Indian Held Kashmir{IHK}; area of operation was divided into four sectors. Main hypothesis revolved around the local population supporting the guerrillas, enemy committing a sizeable force to counter them thus losing moral ground among the international community. A second hypothesis was also evolved, in which, .after the favourable environments have been created then to launch a second offensive from Bhimber towards Akhnur; it was code name as **Operation Grand Slam**.

Resultantly a 5000-7000 force was raised and trained by SSG within six weeks, the Scarlet Thread of the Operation Gibraltar, revolved around two columns of forces converging from north and west at Srinagar. The force structure comprised of seven forces namely Tariq, Qasim, Khalid, Salahuddin, Ghaznvi, Babur and Nusrat . These seven forces, each had three companies which were commanded by an officer from Azad Kashmir. Major Sindhu and Captain Zaka Afridi of SSG were responsible for the establishing and training of force in signal communication. SSG provided the necessary instructors and manpower for training of this force.

Camps were established at Kotli, Mong Bajri, Shinkiari and Rattu. One or two officers, four non-commissioned officers and sixteen soldiers from SSG were employed at each camp for training. The primary focus of training was in handling of weapons and explosives.

Along with the Gibraltar force, SSG planned to carryout deep raids and ambushes on purely military targets inside the Indian Kashmir especially in extreme north in Kargil and Laddakh area

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1965, the designated forces infiltrated into Indian Kashmir successfully, they carried out the task assigned to them, everything worked as per the hypothesis, less the appreciation, that local population will carry out a general uprising against the occupied Indian forces.

**Hamza Company** of SSG was placed undercommand 12 Division for the operations. The company trained the guerrillas, Captain Khalid Mahmood and Captain Muhammad Khan formed two training teams, later both officers and men of Hamza Company operated inside the Indian Kashmir with success Hamza Company was responsible for the conduct of Tariq and Qasim Forces. **Ghazi & Shaheen Companies.** SSG had gone into operations with an aim to recapture the three lost posts on Kafir Pahar in Kargil sector, which were lost in May 1965. Thus much before

the launching of Operation Gibraltar, a force was raised exclusively comprising of SSG troops {Shaheen and Ghazi Companies} undercommand Lieutenant Colonel Afridi, it arrived in Skardu in early June 1965. Later in July Shaheen company was recalled to Cherat thus Ghazi company operated at its own. Ghazi Company divided itself into four groups, Captain Nasrallah, Captain Yamin Khokar, Captain Tariq Mahmood and Captain Tariq Rafi were the officers and leaders.

**Pashkayum Bridge.** Destruction of Pashkayum bridge, located 40 miles east of Kargil on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1965, was a classic commando operations led successfully by Captain Nasrallah alongwith 14 men . On 4<sup>th</sup> August , the commando party crossed over into the Indian held Kashmir. The raiding party apart from the ten commandos also had two guides and two men from Karakorum Scouts. Trekking through an arduous and challenging mountain terrain with heavy loads, party was able to take position around the bridge by last light 11<sup>th</sup> August. A last minute unexpected event almost jeopardised the mission, three Indian trucks with troops stopped at the bridge and for an hour kept sitting in trucks, Captain Nasrallah thought probably the mission has been compromised, but the trucks departed at 2245 hours. The bridge, metal in construction had a strategic implication, its destruction would have crippled the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Division future movement towards the east, if not

for weeks at least for days. Raiding commando party had two machine guns, one rocket launcher, one mortar and M-I rifles alongwith explosives.

At precisely 2320 hours, fire was opened upon the Indian post guarding the bridge, simultaneously, explosives were placed under the bridge and blown, within seven minutes, mission was over with no casualty; there was only one soldier who got a bullet wound on his thigh.

The extrication from such a hostile and far flung area is an exercise by itself. Team marched as quickly as possible, discarding all non-essential equipment, knowing fully well that Indians will be coming after them fast. They marched whole night, taking cover in daylight to avoid any detection by locals or Indian posts. At third night, they were fatigued to the limit, there was no food. Close to a population, they slaughtered a zho { native mountainous buffalo } ate the raw meat and gained strength. The one immediate result of eating raw meat was immense state of sleep and drowsiness . 'I really had to stretch myself to the limit to be able to walk and to make others also walk, otherwise everyone was willing to sleep at the very site, such was our state.' Remarked Brigadier Nasrallah years later. Later another successful raid was carried on at Shodok, a small outpost fifteen miles ahead of Kargil by Captain Nasrallah with 25 men.

## Dras

The successful raid on Dras cantonment by SSG on 15/16<sup>th</sup> August 1965 was the most demoralising for the Indian Army deployed in the area. Captain Tariq Mahmood and Captain Tariq Rafi with thirty four commandos and six guides conducted the operations. The Dras cantonment had one engineer battalion, brigade headquarters and some supply elements. Cantonment itself is small, with a high barbed wire all around, a small landing strip inside the cantonment completes the scenery.

Brigadier Tariq Rafi recalls the operations ‘*initial reconnaissance of Dras Cantonment was carried out off the map in early August, later Captain Tariq Mahmood attempted the first raid but , it not only failed , rather the raiding party was chased and fired upon by the Indians. Resultantly, it was decided by Lieutenant Colonel Afridi, to have two teams for the raid on Dras Cantonment. That is how myself and Captain Tariq Mahmood got together for the operations, we also decided in principle to employ the guides and porters only until base camp and not to take them along till the firing point. On 15 /16<sup>th</sup> August, we were in position, three miles short of the objective, we spent the night close to a lake, it was cold even in summer. Our guide was a civilian Ghulam Rasul., he was born in Dras and now had some genuine and imaginary grudges against*

*the population, his motive was more of personal revenge than nationalism.. We both {groups } now moved further ahead and took up position a mere 800 meters away from cantonment , it was night 15/16<sup>th</sup> August. Main reason for our later success was this thorough reconnaissance which we both officers carried out. We finally selected three main targets, the engineer battalion, brigade headquarters and the transport shed. We also pondered over more targets as the whole cantonment was under our observation, we picked the officers mess and the residences also, aim was to kill as many Indian officers as possible. However later, we reached the conclusion that officers are not residing inside the Dras rather they have accommodation in nearby cantonment Muradabad.*

*We had 39 men in all, armed with six machine guns, three rocket launchers alongwith 36 rockets, one mortar with 18 rounds, each M-I rifle had 192 rounds of ammunition, three anti-tank mines, fifteen anti-personal mines and thirty eight hand grenades. We decided to initiate the raid at 0130 hours and after deciding upon the rendezvous we were hopeful to be back in our base camp by 1000 hours. Major Waheed was at the base camp.*

*We started our approach, ahead were three scouts which cleared the area, we passed through the nullah, and came into open ground, we had not seen this*

*dead ground before, it was not visible from our position. Myself and Captain Tariq Mahmood had discussion, we both had our own views, I was firm that the target is on our right where as he thought and stressed that target is on left.. In pitch darkness we send two scouts to confirm the target direction but they came back after half an hour without any confirmation, we then ourselves walked out to ascertain the direction but still no conclusive results to confirm the direction of the Dras Cantonment. At dawn, we had to retreat back to our previous location, we decided to spent the day in nullah and make an attempt at night. When the mission with so much of planning fails at the end due to such small human mistake, therefore it is but natural that tempers will also shoot up. Myself and Captain Tariq had a hot discussion, but in the end all troops had gone to sleep. Soon another blunder surfaced, the rocket launcher soldiers, in anticipation of the raid, had already taken out the rockets and threw away the packing material , now thirty six such cartons were lying around. Another unexpected twist was the accidental approach of three civilians who just walked next to us and saw us, we captured them and after some time they revealed that they are Muslims and resident of Khandial Village which is close by. We had no option but to trust them, they pointed out the exact location of 7<sup>th</sup> Madras Battalion's tents, these tents were not far off from where we halted last night.*

*At night we walked and guide took us to the near vicinity of the cantonment, but at the final phase, the exact location of target was still not confirm, thus contrary to all teaching, we had to awake a person from the village to show us the tents of the Indian troops. The man walked with us, and after fifty yards , simply pointed to the area ahead , these were Indian soldiers tents.*

*At 2217 hours, the first round was fired from a rocket launcher at a range of 250 yards, soon every weapon with us was firing on the target, one rocket hit the petroleum dump which lit the whole area. Every rifleman was supposed to save at least sixteen rounds for the return journey. Six minutes after the first round was fire, I gave the signal for withdrawal much to the dismay of Captain Tariq Mahmood.*

*Our rendezvous was a clump of tree , now the cantonment was alive, and Indian posts located around the cantonment started firing indiscriminately, to our horror, even the fire came from rendezvous; we had committed another mistake, in not clearing the rendezvous beforehand. Indians made a cardinal mistake, they did not fire a vary light round, had they done so , we all would have been seen . Luck favours the brave, thus we were lucky to escape through safely despite these tactical blunders, by first light we reached our next rendezvous at lake. Next day we were in Skardu.*



On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1965, Pakistan Army launched its Operation Grand Slam, which almost achieved the desired results, Akhnur was merely four miles away, India realising the precarious situation, launched an attack in the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> September 1965 across the international border without any warning.

## **Para-Drops on Indian Airfields - 1965**

In January 1965, Air Chief Marshall Nur Khan brought forward the very idea of destroying the Indian Air Force aircraft on ground; by employing the commandos of SSG; it was a bold, innovate and daring idea. The employment of airborne troops in WWII by the Germans and later by the allies had brought a new revolution in military affairs. The key factor in the stunning success of the German paratroopers was in the fact that they were under the command of Luftwaffe and were part of the air force. In Pakistan the paratrooping was introduced only in 1963 and the para training school was raised in March 1964.

The initial plan and requirement of the PAF involved destruction of the enemy airfields as deep as 250 miles away; later on after deliberation with SSG it was agreed to target only those airfields which are close to border thus Halwara, Pathankot, Ambala, Chandigarh and Adampur airfields were marked as the target. Later

Ambala and Chandigarh were taken off the target list. This plan was finalised in May 1965; In June 1965 the plan was given final touches and Commander SSG Colonel Mehdi gave the briefing to the Air Marshall Nur Khan. The plan revolved around dropping sixty commandos on each of the three airfields, where the commandos would destroy the aircraft, and petroleum tanks and kill aircrew if chance arises. The plan focussed that if execution phase went as per the planning then the PAF aircraft can land on the same airfields and bring back home the commandos; on the other hand, the commandos can extricate themselves in case the own aircraft are unable to land and pick the commandos. This was the most daring plan and highlights the spirits of the nation and the armed forces at that time. Like all military plans, it was accepted in the briefing and planning that the 'Fog of War' will be there, but rationally it offers the best chance to cripple the enemy in the opening hours of the war. Years and decades later the same scarlet thread of destroying the enemy airforce on ground has been implemented with varying success by armies around the world.

The Plan's Scarlet Thread was in the notion that Pakistan will have the advantage of initiating the war, thus the element of surprise will be with the attacker. However the changing face of events in August {Operation Gibraltar} and later Operation Grand Slam,;

which almost achieved the desired end resulted in Indians launching the attack across the international border without any warning there by on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> September 1965, initiative was with the enemy.

GHQ in a bold move, decided to go ahead with the plan and orders reached Cherat at 0930 hours to be ready for the execution phase. Ranger battalions at Cherat and Attock received the orders at 1000 hours . The Group Commander Colonel S.G. Mehdi himself was on short emergency leave thus the orders were received and passed by acting commander Lieutenant Colonel Abdul Mateen. *‘ I was called by the company commander at 1045 hours and told to get the men ready and be prepared to move at short notice to Peshawar, I later detailed Company Havildar Major to collect the men, I also detailed naib subedar to collect ammunition and explosives, at 1130 hours I distributed the ammunition and we loaded our equipment and ration in the heavy vehicles, we faced problem and delays in this as the number of heavy vehicles were limited, we left Attock at 1300 hours and reached Para Training School {PTS} in another hour. I gave the ration to PTS for cooking our evening meal and also to prepare our two days pack ration. At 1900 hours I was briefed by the company commander on our task. We thus rigged the equipment, due to shortage , we rigged two packs together, before getting into the C-130 aircraft , our*

*company commander showed us the air photograph of the intended airfield, at 2345 hours we were inside the aircraft which took off at 0100 hours and we jumped out at 0230 hours’.*

There were some inevitable delays, the companies which were initially earmarked for the para drops {Ebrahim and Kamal} were short of manpower due to troops proceeding on leave, this shortage was fulfilled from men of Ayub and Hamza companies. In ordinary circumstances this adjustment of men would have very little bearing on the operation but in this particular operation this was a cardinal factor on the overall outcome of operation. At Peshawar, the delay was due to planning of the air raid by own aircraft over the Indian airfields, the three C-130s had to be provided with an escort and a complete local air supremacy for the safety of the paratroopers.

Pathankot , Halwara and Adampur all are situated in the first cardinal from Lahore. Pathankot is the closest to the border , a mere thirty miles. Followed by Halwara near Hoshiarpur, and then Adampur near Ludhiana; all these airfields are located in Indian Punjab. The three groups were; Pathankot team was led by Major Khalid Gulrez Butt , Captain Bunyad Hussain, Captain Muhammad Azad and 61 Rangers. Adampur airfield team was led by Captain S.A. Durrani, Captain Ghulam Kabir, Captain Muhammad Ashraf along with 55

Rangers. For Halwara Captain Hassan Iftikhar, Captain Ghulam Ahmad, Captain Hazoor Hasnain and 63 Rangers.

### **Pathankot**

Naik Mohammad Sarwar, landed in between the railway line and road, Subedar{ PJO 37939} Fazal Shah of Kamal Company, jumped out from the C-130 at 0227 hours, after two minutes he landed in the middle of canal ,’ *I fell into the water, I swam and came out, wrapped my parachute, punctured and cut at random, to make it unserviceable, hid it under a bush and started searching my team mate. Soon I made contact with two, then four and finally we all were in touch with Major Butt and Captain Bunyad,; all in all we were 26 commandos. We tried to search for other paratroopers but in vain,. Due to paucity of time Major Butt decided to carryout the arid with the available men...we crossed a metallic road, and immediately came under fire, we took positions and manoeuvred, cross the canal bridge in the process and were moving in a straight file, when we realised that we are being followed. Havildar Abbas Ali, Lance Naik Muzzaffar and Sepoy Shah Nawaz thus laid an ambush for the enemy{ all three were martyred}, meanwhile rest of the body kept marching in darkness. Now the dawn broke out and we found ourselves in open fields. We threw our all extra luggage and equipment, less ammunition and*

*explosives in the canal, Major Butt now divided the group into two parties and each was left to make its own arrangement, I was in Major Butt's team. We had decided to meet at a rendezvous after dark and to make another attempt to raid the Pathankot airfield.. We marched and established a hideout in the crops, we remained in the crops till evening, at around 1700 hours, our sentry warned us that almost two infantry companies of enemy have encircled us. Major Butt decided to fight till last. Indians were fired upon as soon as we heard the rustle of crop being disturbed, in return a machine gun volley was sprayed through the crops by the Indians along with mortar. We soon ran out of our ammunition, finally after a deadly pause, enemy started searching us in the crop and a hand to hand fight erupted. At the end, our hands were tied and we were taken to Pathankot in trucks'.*

### **Adampur**

Havildar Malik SherBaz Khan was performing the duties of Ebrahim Company's company havildar major {CHM}. He wrote '*I landed north of the Adampur airfield, immediately I tucked my parachute and with the help of north star I started walking ...soon I encountered few paratroopers, thus we were four in total, soon I found Sepoy Ghulam Nabi, he had my*

*rucksack, it took few minutes to change the rucksack, it was deadly error as we both lost track of our men and as such had to walk at our own...we both marched towards the Adampur airfield, short of airfield, we left our rucksack in fields and with only weapons and ammunition started stalking towards the airfield, we both could see the light of the airfield , which was burning due to recent attack by our aircraft on airfield. At 1000 yards short of airfield, all of a sudden the anti aircraft and ground weapons started firing, O assumed as if own commandos have initiated the arid on the airfield. It was now dawn 7<sup>th</sup> September 1965. We both remained hidden in the crops and waited for the outcome of the raid. I could hear on the village loudspeaker the announcement regarding our arrests and presences. For next whole week, we both marched in and around , hiding ourselves in the crops. On the night of 16/17<sup>th</sup> September, myself and Sepoy Nabi were on the outskirts of Jullundur City, we crossed a road, and the parallel railway line...an enemy patrol of ten men was walking , we both hid ourselves behind the tree, the enemy patrol was so close to us that we both could hear them talking, unfortunately, Sepoy Nabi coughed at that precise moment. The Indians opened fire on us, we returned the fire and made good of our escape. We stalked and passed through the outer limits of the railway station, a dog barked on us and we had to jump into a nullah to save our life. We finally took cover in a maize field.*

*It was 17<sup>th</sup> September now, the field in which we had taken cover, there was a water pitcher closeby, a Sikh working in the field would occasionally come and take a swig out of it. We change our position and due to tiredness and fatigue soon slept. All of a sudden I woke up , and a cursory reconnaissance confirmed my worst fear, we were encircled by the enemy, I assessed the situation, we had no ammunition left, thus as a last resort we just remained idle , hoping that providence will help us...we were arrested and blindfolded and taken to the police station’.*

## **Halwara**

Subedar Allah Ditta {PJO5980} of Ebrahim Company narrates , *‘After landing , we collected our parachutes and in darkness, got together, First Lance Naik Noor Muhammad met me, then Sepoy Bashir, we walked together, later seven more commandos joined us, we were now ten men. I tried to search for other but in vain. At 0330 hours, we walked towards the airfield , after a mile and half of march, we heard the aircraft noises and the machine gun fire. In this situation, soon the dawn emerged. We spent the day bin the maize field and at evening started walking again towards the target . At 1845 hours we were very close to the airfield, short of it we drank water from a well, our morale was high and we decided , not to go back empty handed. At 1930*



*hours, the airfield came under heavy attack from our own aircraft, at that time we were 400 yards short of the outer perimeter of the airfield. A bomb exploded very close to us, in this fog of war situation, we decided to retreat back to the crops, thinking that the airfield has been destroyed as per the initial planning. The rendezvous which was originally agreed upon was the canal bridge so thus we waited there for an hour but none came to join us. We decided to trek back to Pakistan at our own and to link up with the commandos; thus the remaining part of night was spent in the fields adjacent to canal. Next day {8<sup>th</sup> September 1965} we remained inside the crops waiting for the darkness when at 1500 hours two civilians entered the crops and started reaping, they both dangerously reached close to me. All of a sudden they ran back, I knew that they have spotted us, thus we also change our position, we walk all night and on the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> September we were spotted by civilians busy in watering their fields. We now were running from field to field but soon we were encircled by the police and army, an announcement was being made on the loud speaker, all Pakistanis hiding in the field to come out without your weapons. We for some time responded back in fire but after ammunition had been expended, we came out of the field'.*

The paratroop mission although it did not go as per planning but still it made its impact on the overall

outcome of the war. The mere presence of paratroopers created a wave of terror among the Indian population and the army. The aircraft were taken away from the forward bases, an entire army division {14 Mountain} was stopped while proceeding towards the Samba – Sialkot axis, to hunt down the paratroopers; in the end the very division was mauled by the PAF while parked in hunt of paratroopers. A total of 182 paratroopers took part in the operation, 64 for Patahmkot, 55 for Adampur and 63 for Halwara airfields, five commandos embraced martyrdom, 13 were injured, 15 became missing in action and 127 were captured, only 22 managed to reach back to Pakistan.

Another operation was planned on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1965, Ambala airfield was the designated target, and Ghazi Company was the executor. At noon, on same day, a briefing was held at Para Training School at Peshawar, however the mission was cancelled in the hatching period. Indians did not launch any paradrop in Pakistan during 1965 War. But a rumour spread across the country and especially in the army field headquarters regarding the presence of Indian paratroopers in Kharian and Rawalpindi. Few infantry battalions were moved at night, patrolling was conducted around all army and air force bases; in the end these just proved to be rumours, it highlights the kind of terror which the mere rumour of paratroops creates. Own operation against Indian

airfields should be seen in the background of mental paralysis which they were able to sow in the minds of Indian military mind set.

## **SSG Companies in War**

The companies which did not took part in the paradrop were employed on various missions, **Ghazi Company** after the mission for Ambala was cancelled , moved to Shakargarh area with Captains Tariq Mahmood, Tariq Rafi and Nasrallah in command. Ghazi Company was trusted with the disruption of Indian military convoys on the road Jammu –Kathua. On the night of 21/22 September, company moved to Chammb Jaurian undercommand Major Naeem, the mission was to get the information about the enemy disposition in the area. Later in first week of October, Ghazi Company was moved into Zafarwal area.

**Ayub Company.** The company during Operation Grand Slam was undercommand 15 Infantry Division, on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, it came under the operational command of 7 Infantry Division. The task was classical commando missions; create terror among the enemy, which the company did remarkably. Early on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> September, company commander Major

Sarwar embraced shahadat, while Captain Muhammad Inayat was wounded. On 7<sup>th</sup> September, while carrying out an commando raid on enemy gun position in Jaurian sector, Captain Muhammad Sadiq and Sepoy Muhammad Riaz not only accomplished the mission , Captain Sadiq later succumbed to the bullet wounds sustained during operation and embraced shahadat. Major Shamim Alam Khan took over the command of the company, it was later placed undercommand 1 Corps. From the night of 8<sup>th</sup> September the company was tasked to detect and exterminate the Indian commandos who were rumoured to be present between Daska-Sialkot area. As the rumours turned out to be mere rumours, the Ayub Company and Ghazi Company were employed together on destruction of Indian troops moving on Kathua-Samba- Jammu road. Few targets were engaged, one medium gun was destroyed on the night of 12/13 September, and in another raid an Indian tank was disabled. An Indian post near Ramgarh was attacked while coming back from a patrol, In the dying hours of the war, an opportunity target in the form of a retreating Indian infantry company was ambushed with great success.

**Shaheen Company**, at the onset of war was already deployed in Neelum Valley, later the 12 Division employed the company in the defence of an outpost. The post itself came under enemy attack, the post was

defended, in the accomplishment of mission two soldiers embraced martyrdom. **Jangju Company** was undercommand 15 Infantry Division, they were task at the very first night of the war 6/7<sup>th</sup> September to carryout raid and ambushes on the road Kathua – Samba. The ambush was a success, one major reason of the success was the induction of the Punjab Rangers {Sutlej Wing}. An inspector and 25 soldiers of Sutlej Rangers accompanied the commandos. The knowledge of area was and is still critical for the success of any commando raid. SSG had been carrying out regular and periodic reconnaissance of the border areas, still the knowledge which the Punjab Rangers had accumulated by virtue of seven years of stay at one particular place cannot be matched. In the end, two enemy trucks and one jeep was destroyed.

**Tipu Company** . After the ceasefire, a minor war erupted in the desert between Pakistan and India, in which the Indians tried to recapture the lost posts in the desert. A Desert Force was thus raised with rangers of Desert Rangers. Tipu Company arrived undercommand Major Fazal Akbar in Rahim Yar Khan on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1965; their two main task were to train the mujahedeen and to carryout raids on enemy lines of communication. Tipu Company was thus grouped into three teams, each led by Major Fazal, Captain Waheed Arshad Gujial and Captain Inayat. The very first mission was to ambush an

enemy convoy, thus on the night of 17<sup>th</sup> November at 2100 hours, a twenty commandos team led by company commander moved out of Kishengarh and establish a position almost twenty miles further east. At 0400 hours the reported convoy came and was successfully ambushed, destroying an enemy truck along with a jeep; two Indian soldiers were taken as prisoners as well. Another successful ambush was carried out by Captain Waheed on the night of 29<sup>th</sup> November , the target was the command echelon of an 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Grenadier {an infantry battalion}. Ambush was carried out in broad daylight as enemy had almost abandoned the travelling after dark due to fear of own commandos. At Achari Toba, local guides were taken , so were a section of Desert Rangers. Ambush site was between the Tanot-Sadewala posts within enemy territory. At 0930 hours the prey entered the killing zone, after few minutes of firing, the three occupant of the jeep, Major Poran Singh, one captain and two soldiers were killed and own commando force extricated safely.

The success of these mission owe much to the local para military organisation notably the Punjab Rangers. SSG had not trained on the camel riding and handling, as it had concentrated more on mountainous warfare thus Desert Rangers expertise in desert came very handy.

In East Pakistan, where **Quaid Company** was undercommand 23 Brigade ex 14 Infantry Division. There was not much of action on the Eastern front. On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1965, in the lone mission of war, the Quaid Company carried out an ambush on an Indian defensive position with success.

In the 1965 War, SSG lost three officers, one junior commissioned officer and 26 soldiers. It was decorated with ten Sitara-i-Jurat, twelve Tamgha –i-Jurat, one Sitara-i-Basalt , two Tamgha-i-Basalt and 23 Imtiaz Sanads.

## East Pakistan

East Pakistan constituted 15% of Pakistan's area but it had 52% of population. Thus under the 1970 general election, the very first elections since 1947, the Awami League won an outright majority in East Pakistan but failed to win a single seat from West Pakistan thus similarly no party from West Pakistan was able to win any seat from the eastern wing; this brought the whole country to a standstill position. Delays in finding the political solution further pushed the alienated Bengalis into an open rebellion which was backed and funded by India; East Bengal Regiments started revolting. SSG had one battalion {3 SSG } in East Pakistan since 1965, the battalion was raised there and

for all practical purpose was under the control of 14 Division and later came under the command of newly raised Eastern Command at Dacca. In Late 1970s another battalion 2 Commando Battalion SSG was also sent to East Pakistan.<sup>16</sup>

East Pakistan was separated from West Pakistan by a distance of 1600 kilometres of Indian territory, the province itself was surrounded by India from all sides less a small strip in east which joins it with Burma, Bay of Bengal in the south provided the access to the sea. Thick jungles, innumerable ravines and river among which the Meghna and Brahmaputra were the two main river, highly dense population, lack of communication infrastructure in terms of road therefore railways attain greater importance. Dacca was the capital, lying in an open field of 100 kilometres in length having a width of 60 odd kilometres. The military organisation in the eastern province other than the sole 14 Infantry Division comprised mainly the East Bengal Regiment {EBR} a militia outfit having responsibility of looking after the porous border with India, it had six battalions {5000 manpower}. In late 1970, the 14 Division was reinforced with 9 and 16 Infantry Divisions from West

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed account of 3 Commando Battalion, please see Brigadier Zaheer Khan's *The Way it Was*, {Army Book Club, 2000}



Pakistan along with 4 Army Aviation Squadron { having 4 MI-8 utility helicopters and three Alouettes } .

On 25 March 1971, the insurgency started in East Pakistan, General Yahya Khan the Commander in Chief and President of Pakistan imposed martial law in East Pakistan and army crackdown on the Awami League and its militant wing Mukti Bhani started.

### **Arrest of Sheikh Mujib.**

The very first action and task of SSG {2 Commando Battalion } was to arrest the rebel leader Sheikh from his residence in Dacca, a failure to do so would have jeopardised the whole operation, Sheikh was a popular leader thus required a meticulous planning and execution. Mission was accomplished without any casualty, however it highlighted the need to have troops more trained for such kinds of snap actions. Couple of years later Sheikh Mujib was killed in the same house by his own troops in a coup.

### **SSG Role and Employment in Counter-Insurgency.**

This was the first ever employment of SSG in the counter insurgency role; it did not go very well in the end for various reasons and factors. SSG was employed to flush out the rebels in almost every nick and corner of the province. It is often compared with the counter insurgency operation in Malaya but there is very little

similarity between the two campaigns. The insurgency and counter insurgency operations lasted from March-November 1971, in which commandos were employed to clear the roads, recapture small towns and cities from the rebel, protect the vital bridges and keep the lines of communication open, hit at the suspected rebel hideouts and training camps. The majority of commandos were taken out from Eastern Front prior to the outbreak of war. During the December 1971 War {3-16 December 1971} few elements of SSG were kept as reserve by the Eastern Command, they were employed between 10-14<sup>th</sup> December to counter the Indian paratroopers which were dropped near Dacca. In East Pakistan, it was also the first time that commandos and army aviation were employed together and wherever both were employed together the results were positive and morale boosting.

In East Pakistan. ‘ *at sunset if one walked in the streets of a village, from almost every house came the sound of the recitation of the Koran. While walking through a village or Haat {bazar} the feeling was that you were in a foreign country, you could not understand nobody and nobody understood you... while shopping in Commilla city we discovered that we were not liked*’.  
 Remarked Lieutenant Colonel Z.A. Khan the commanding officer of 2 Commando Battalion

## A Black Evening

SSG suffered the worst in its short history, when in Chittagong on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1971, the SSG Battalion was ambushed and resultantly no less than 28 soldiers including the commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman were martyred.

Ghazi Company was airlifted from West Pakistan on 27<sup>th</sup> March and very next day it arrived at Chittagong along with Shaheen Company, a city under siege by the rebels {Mukti Bahni}. SSG immediately on arrival at Chittagong formed into three mobile groups, one group comprised of Ghazi Company and Hamza Company of 3 Commando Battalion, other two groups comprised of men from Ghazi and Shaheen Companies; their mission was to clear the road to Dacca where 24 Frontier Force Regiment had lost contact with the higher headquarters. The two SSG Battalion in East Pakistan namely 2 Commando Battalion was under command Lieutenant Colonel Zaheer Alam Khan and 3 Commando Battalion was being commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman Khan.

On 28<sup>th</sup> March 1971, at 1600 hours, the task force left naval base at Chittagong in a eight truck convoy'; in the first four trucks were the troops of 3 Commando and in the other trucks were the men from Shaheen

Company. Major Iqbal { Ghazi Company} was in the lead, followed by Captain Sikander { adjutant}, in the third truck were the commanding officer { Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman} and twenty commandos, in the fourth truck were twenty more commandos with Naib Subedar Kabir Khan. A mile after departing from base, astride Karnafuli River, close to the Radio Pakistan building the convoy was ambushed at 1700 hours. The machine gun fire along with grenades hit the trucks and claimed initial casualties, as commandos dismounted from the trucks and tried to charge the radio building the machine gun fire took further toll, commanding officer was hit with a burst of bullets. In the first two minutes the leading three trucks took the brunt of fire. Major Iqbal despite being in the leading truck miraculously survived and tried to counter the situation by taking up position astride the road. All night long the battle between the rebels and commandos continued, it was by 0900 hours next morning that with reinforcement the building was cleared and secured.

## The First Heliborne Operation, Bhairab Bazar- 15<sup>th</sup> April 1971

The SSG operation to raid and capture the strategic vital rail-road bridge at Bhairab Bazar over

River Meghna, which was under the control of the rebels, was a highlight and silver lining of SSG operations in East Pakistan during the insurgency period. Bridge was vital for any major army operation towards the east of the Dacca to eliminate the rebels. There were no less than two battalions of rebels holding the bridge and intelligence reports indicated that these rebels have placed the explosives under the bridge, in order to destroy it rather than Eastern Command capturing it intact.

Shaheen and Janjgu Companies were employed for the capture of the bridge intact. Major Tariq Mahmood was leading the Shaheens with him was Captain Afzal Janjua . Captain Arif and Captain Shoukat were leading the Jangu company. Plan envisaged on cashing the initial surprise heliborne landing of Shaheen Company, which will assault the bridge thus taking the guards on bridge off guard,, and in the next wave the same helicopters would drop the Jangu company. 4 Army Aviation Squadron the sole rotary aviation effort in East Pakistan with its two MI-8 and two Alouttes III helicopters were integrated into the operation. There was no time for any practise, thus it was mainly coordinated verbally. Lieutenant Colonel Shakoor Jan was the overall commander of the operation .

At 0600 hours on 15<sup>th</sup> April, two MI-8 helicopters landed just a mile away from the main bridge, the reason for this distance away was in the fact that there were electric wires running around the bridge thus the only viable landing spot was utilised. Rebels opened small arms fire , but amidst the fire the two helicopters landed on two opposing spots away from bridge, and Lieutenant Colonel Shakoor Jan and Major Tariq Mahmood along with the commandos jumped and rushed towards the bridge; helicopters in running rotors took off to bring the next wave of commandos to the target area.

Meanwhile, commandos rushed towards the bridge from two opposing direction, rebels opened fire and over fifteen commandos were injured, yet the importance of the bridge and the time factor was so vital that they just charged forward ; Major Tariq Mahmood was able to save the day as the rebel had almost lit the match stick to ignite the explosives for blowing up the bridge but in the end Major Tariq was able to kill the rebel and save the bridge.

This operation raised the morale of the population and the army in East Pakistan. It also set the direction in which it was agreed that the most viable employment of SSG in East Pakistan revolves around having joint operations involving army aviation.

## Patauakhali Operation -18<sup>th</sup> April 1971.

Success at Bhairab Bazaar led to another Heliborne operation, this time it was Patauakhali, a small town where rebels had established a parallel government thereby reducing the writ of the state. Shaheen Company under Major Tariq Mahmood along with Captain Tahir, Captain Zafar Mahmood and twelve commandos were part of a task force which also had an infantry battalion in support {30 Frontier Force} . The Shaheen Company was the first to be landed in two Mi-8 helicopters a mere thousand yards away from the rebel held police lines, in the second wave which landed after fifteen minutes the company of 30 FF was dropped. Shaheen Company in the meanwhile not only secure the helipad but had also rushed towards the kote and ammunition stores, overpowered the rebels without any loss of life to the company . Within an hour the police lines were secured and after a day the writ of state was established in the town.

**Training.** In East Pakistan, the commando training was modified and made realistic with the environments, frogman element was trained in being dropped from helicopters in river from where they approached their target both in day and night. Battalions of SSG were equipped with long range communication set {GRC-9} which weigh about ninety pounds and was carried by

three men, for short range communication, line of sight sets PRC-10 were issued; thus signallers were often sited at the tree tops to increase the range.

### **Tabal Chari - June 1971**

One of the classic commando operation which involved long marches through the jungle terrain and then attacking the rebel camps was carried out in the early hours of 12<sup>th</sup> June 1971, a mere hundred meters away from the international border with India. The operation was a complete success as more than thirty rebels were killed and the training base was utterly destroyed. Tabal Chari and Khagra were two small border outposts at Chittagong where the rebels were continuously harassing the local tribes and had established their training camps as well. Ghazi Company was given the task to eliminate the training camps of the rebels.

Ghazi Company{ 23 commandos} under Major Iqbal, Captain Arjumand and Captain Qadir along with three guides and thirty odd collies move from Rangamatti in boats to Panchari Bazar, a journey of over fifteen hours where a firm base was established. Intelligence was gathered about the intended assault camp. One major handicap was the language as none of the officer knew the Bengali, thus through interpreters the information was gathered, not an appropriate method



of launching an operation. In the end a wise decision was taken ; to opt for a route which was opposite to the one recommended by the interpreter and guides. Three teams were formed, one under the command of Major Muhammad Iqbal with twelve commandos, second team under Captain Arjumand with seven commandos and captain Qadir had four commandos with him. These teams marched from their firm base and established themselves three miles short of target area on a relatively high ground thus keeping the intended raiding camp under observation. It rain all night and the rice paddies were brim with water so were the half a dosen water channels ; it was a test of endurance. At 0400 hours amidst the early morning fog the teams launched the operation, they attacked the camp with precision and lethality. They destroyed the camp, blew up the bamboo bridge over River Fenni which linked the rebels with Indian border post of Sala Chari.. One of the key factor of success was the meticulous planning and reconnaissence of the target area.

In the 2 Commando Battalion only one officer Major Salman Ahmed of Ebrahim Company had served in East Pakistan, he had served two years with the 3 Commando Battalion almost six months ago. The normal pattern of service in SSG was that whereas 3 Commando Battalion was the permanent battalion responsible for entire Eastern Front, the companies were rotated among

the three SSG battalions, on a tenure of two years. There were Bengali soldiers and officers in the SSG{ Lieutenant Haider of Jangju Company, Captain Rehman the medical officer of 3 Commando are few of the examples}, they were, however taken off the battalion strength before the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971 action; unfortunately commanding officer was not taken into confidence before the action.

## Sylhet - June 1971

Sylhet had similar narrative , here the rebels had not only taken over the civil administration rather they had also established the Free Bangladesh . Own 117 Brigade {39 Baluch , 30 FF regiments} was given the task to clear the area of rebels. Brigade was given the Shaheen Company undercommand, which in turn was split into two groups, each attached with one infantry battalion. Overall strength of the company was 63 all ranks , undercommand Major Tariq Mahmood with Captains Zafar Mahmood and Shoukat Anwar.

Plan was simple, to block the escape routes of rebels leading to the India and simultaneously attack their camps. It involved a long treacherous trek through the jungle which was controlled by the rebels, the successful penetration of the jungle despite rebels firing is the highlight and highpoint of the operation. On the

morning of 17<sup>th</sup> June 1971, the regular battalions launched their attack on rebels , as the rebels tried to escape towards the India, to their horror they found the commandos blocking the exit. Company suffered its only casualties during the operation when it tried to pursuit the rebels, thus three commandos were injured due to anti personal mines. Shaheen Company after the operation was airlifted to Dacca on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1971.

## **December 1971**

The undeclared war in East Pakistan which had started in March 1971, became a full fledged war on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1971, after Pakistan launched an attack in the west. The military situation in East Pakistan had already reached a point where only bold and calculated strategy could hold the front to a point where a decisive blow delivered in west could salvage the situation. The blow in west never materialised therefore the war in East Pakistan was mainly fought in isolated pockets of resistance by infantry battalions. SSG was kept in reserve for a possible airdrop behind the Indians however before our plans could be finalised the Indians launched and dropped their paratroopers in and around Dacca. Thus SSG in the last week of the war was employed in hunting the Indian paratroopers. The SSG battalions in East Pakistan were pulled back to West Pakistan , a month prior to actual start of war in the west;

however they were not employed in any striking role other than minor operations with relative success.

### **Special Services Group Training**

On 24 March 1972, three MI-8 moved to Mianwali for eight days of exhaustive training in the Mianwali and Kundian desert areas. Besides day time missions, each night commando raids were also practiced. The three choppers would pick up thirty fully equipped commandoes and drop them in the desert in close formation, without using lights. These nocturnal formation landings were stressful as the dust kicked by the heavily loaded MI-8 blinds the pilot, leaving no margin for errors. Pilots discovered that under the circumstances the best thing was not to plan any hovering at all. Each night an average of five hours were logged by each helicopter.

## **SSG & Afghan War 1979-1990**

SSG was primarily raised in 1955 to counter the Soviet invasion and military adventurism in Pakistan, by acting as a stay behind force. SSG was meant for not only keeping themselves in a high state of training but

also to establish network of safe house, people, villages and tribes. Which were to act as the base and nucleus for any guerrilla warfare against the Russian. In late fifties {1959-1960} SSG platoons traversed the frontier, they were present in Chitral, Skardu, Waziristan, Pishin, Chaman agencies and states. However the need never arise and the entire generation of the officers retired or posted out before the actual invasion of Afghanistan by Russians in 1979. President General Zia Ul Haq had decided in principal to put up as much resistance to the Soviet as possible without raising the temperature beyond control. Western world led by USA were also looking for such an opportunity where Russians could be mauled. Thus the two decades old relationship between Pakistan and USA were revived and military aid again started flowing in an unprecedented manner.

Instead of SSG the inter service Intelligence was made responsible for coordination among the mujahedeen, to create a unity among them, to distribute military equipment among dosen or so fighting sections and factions. SSG was given the task of training the mujahedeen, officers from SSG were attached and posted to sub units of ISI where they established training camps and started imparting military and guerrilla training. These SSG officers in true guerrilla traditions, won the heart and mind of the Afghan resistance fighters. SSG itself did not raised any additional units or

sub units for this purpose rather the environments were as such that apart from this activity there was no other operation in hand.

Afghans are good fighters, not all but a substantial number of tribes have an inbuilt taste for guerrilla warfare, what they lacked was the proper organisation, the conduct of raid and ambush, use of explosives and communication. SSG officers did operated within Afghanistan alongwith Mujahedeen, in order to assess the weaknesses and correct shortcomings. SSG officers were wearing the native dress code and adhering to the local traditions which in any case are not different from our own. These officers learnt Pashtu language, although the efforts were made to depute and attach those SSG officers which already speak Pashtu.

Jallozai became the biggest refugee camp in Pakistan, there was a hustle and bustle all the time at Pabbi. the shops at Peshawar and Rawalpindi were selling the American and Russian military outfits which included jackets, shoes, and host of kit items. The American green fatigue jacket, web belt and shoes became popular, infact the green jacket became the symbol of resistance.

### **Taliban.**

In the end, Soviet had to withdrew and resultantly disintegrated, SSG played its due role in this

retreat of a superpower from neighbouring Afghanistan. This also marked the official end of century and half old Forward Policy , which had only this aim; to defeat Russia. The Afghanistan itself was plunged into civil war , in which in the end Taliban , mostly Pashtun religious students led the offensive which resulted in the capitulation of capital Kabul. These Taliban were also at some stage were part of the training camps win which Afghan freedom fighters were being trained. SSG officers roamed freely among these Taliban, Colonel Amir Sultan Tarrar alias Colonel Imam is one such example. He for years was associated with the Afghan affairs , later in 2010,after retirement, he was abducted while travelling with journalist and after month of suspense he was shot dead by Taliban and video released on social media.

## Chapter IV

### **Special Service Group in Baluchistan & Siachen**

SSG was kept busy in the seventies and eighties apart from operational missions , the minor operations against the Farrari in Baluchistan and Dacoits in Sindh. Farrari operations in Baluchistan started in July 1973 , 1 Commando and 3 Commando Battalions were employed; at times tandem also, but most of time each commando battalion operated independent of each other.

Baluchistan, is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of area and the smallest in terms of population density. Province is barren, dry, harsh in weather, lack water at everywhere, thus relies solely on the rain and snow. Society is tribal in nature, especially the Baluch tribes of Marri and Bugti, the centre of the Farraris . The tribal ‘sirdar’ holds the lifeline of the tribe and the tribesmen willingly submits to the will of Sirdar. Farrari is thus the force maintained by the Sirdar, a kind of tribal commandos. Trouble had always been brewing and spilling between the federation and the tribes, since the



early days of British raj and later same continued after the creation of Pakistan.

In November 1973 a series of small operations were launched under the name Operation Crossed Swords, between 18-30 November in general Fazal Chal-Kala Buha-Triman and Dill, apart from the Dill which was a two village complex, all other were deserted small habitats. The villages in the Marri tribe area as in other part of Baluchistan, are dependent upon the rain for any cultivation. In the absence of water, sheep breeding is the major source of occupation. Operation Crossed Sword was to clear the area of Alianis {sub tribe of Marri}. There was no communication tracks, less between Fazal Chal-Kohlu. I Commando battalion with engineers and mortar battery in support conducted the operation. ‘no resistance was encountered anywhere in this operation, Sirdars of Dill gave up 20 rifles’, noted 1 Commando war diary.

In summer 1974, a convoy of troops was ambushed near Duki killing five troops and injuring twelve. In retaliation to the ambush an operation was launched. This operation was conducted by 3 Special Services Group Battalion in area Jandran Range. There was a deviation from the initial tactics instead of force being inserted by helicopter from the onset, it was decided that troops would march and MI-8 would reinforce the battalion at dawn with rations, ammunition,

troops and would also pick the casualties. There was no pre planned landing site designated thus it was decided that flares would be fired for the landing. Two major operations in term of manpower employed were conducted in 1974, code name as 'Red Beret' and 'Red Star', commandos of I and III battalions took part; There were occasional ambush of the forces, but no concentrated attack was launched by the rebels or insurgents.

Farrari tactics were more akin to commando tactics, they would in such circumstances take hide out in remote and inaccessible mountainous gorges. Had an excellent intelligence network, no shortage of volunteer to join them, relying upon local own tribesmen for logistics and feeding. Commando battalions as part of overall army strategy were employed to clear the hideouts of the insurgents, forcing them to retreat through the selected exit routes , where blocking positions were already placed' this tactics did not produce desired results . The Farrari being a native knew the area more than anybody else thus the escape routes were known to him. Helicopters were used by the commandos in aerial reconnaissance .

### **Operation Chamalang, 25 August-2 September 1974**

This operation was launched to search and apprehend hostiles from area Chamalang, Kharlakgarh, and Garwadda Garh.. “By this time the hostiles were cordoned off and pushed towards their grazing areas on the border of Baluchistan and Punjab. Chamalang was their main grazing field for summer...we were unable to penetrate their safety cordon., there was a broken ground leading to the grazing field which our jeeps could not cross and rebels held the far bank... This was the most successful operation of the whole campaign with over 125 hostiles dead, 900 captured with own casualties of 3 dead including one officer from Special Services Group.

The Baluchistan operations were a good teaching grounds, the extreme weather in summer resulted in readjusting the standard payload of a commando, now water became the most important item.

### **Operation Tail Star -12<sup>th</sup> June 1976**

It was another search operation involving 33 Azad Kashmir, 38 Frontier Force and 1 Commando Battalions supported by one MI-8, one UH-1H, and a L-19 aircraft. It was conducted in area Surf Nullah-Tadri-Khatran River on 12<sup>th</sup> June. Another operation was conducted on 14<sup>th</sup> June in area Siah Kach-Waghi by 10 Baloch Regiment .

### **Donkeys Had Joy-Ride.**

In June 1976, while operating around Bhambore, near Lehri area, one MI-8 piloted by Major Ashraf spotted a group of miscreants. The SSG troops on board netted them well and proper. The news flashed to the concerned authorities, who ordered to bring all the captured to the headquarters immediately. There was, however, a slight comical snag. The group also included two donkeys, used as beasts of burden by the rebels. Not to be caught on the wrong foot, in violation of an executive order, headquarters were contacted again and the funny situation explained. To the amazement of all at the receiving end, the previous clear-cut order was repeated with unambiguous emphasis to bring along the four legged animals also. Thus the donkeys were also made to ride in the helicopter along with others.

### **Brigadier Tariq DRRG-S**

Major Farouk Hamid, an MI-8 veteran remembers one particular flight with late Brigadier Tariq Mahmood SJ & Bar, “We were flying towards a particular area where it was reported that one local rebel sardar was seen in his native village, as we neared the lonely mud house, I saw one white horse standing outside and the sardar on hearing the MI-8 noise was hurriedly saying farewell to his family, as we approached, he mounted his horse and galloped. TM was sitting on the flight engineer’s seat keenly observing all this. He requested

me to take him over the horse, to my bewilderment he later jumped onto the rider from the hovering helicopter and got hold of him”. TM was known for such bold actions. Incidentally, Brigadier TM’s elder brother was an Army Aviator-Brigadier. Masud ul Hassan

## **Epilogue**

The insurgency operation came to an end in July 1977 when General Zia Ul Haq took over the reins of the country and declared general amnesty to all the hostile elements. 2 Commando Battalion remained stationed at Quetta till 1982, before it moved to Tarbela..

## **Anti Dacoits Operation 1988-1990**

SSG was employed in interior Sind during the latter half of eighties to curb the menace of dacoits, these dacoits had establish a reign of terror through kidnapping for ransom and looting of trucks and other vehicles on main highways. SSG companies and platoons were attached with field formations for hunting of these dacoits. SSG officers would roam in disguise of locals, gathering information and then laying ambushes on dacoits. The operation itself was successfully terminated in 1990.

Siachen{ locally means , plenty of wild roses’} the highest battlefield in the world came into limelight from 1983 till do date; Siachen Glacier at an elevation of 18000 feet and above is the highest and the coldest battlefield which man has ever encountered in his entire history. It is living in modern era and fighting a battle under ice age circumstances. The average temperature in summer is below zero, pleasant in day , cold at night but still bearable. During winter which sets in from October onwards and last till April, there are snow storms, chilling winds, temperature falling below 30 Celsius on majority of the season, there is no scale to measure the snow fall, for days it keeps on falling and falling. Siachen Glacier lies to the north east of the Skardu and an hour crow flight from K-2. It is the northern slope of the of the great mountain ranges of Karakorum and Himalayas; in north across the glacier lies the Chinese Civilisation and on south is the Indus Civilisation. K-2, Broad Peak, Hidden Peak , all above eight thousand alongwith the over 100 more peaks above 7000 meters are in Indus Civilisation , in and around Siachen Glacier.

Tradition and local history of Baltistan {Siachen falls under the administrative boundary Baltistan which is now a province of Pakistan} states that in ancient time , people from Baltistan travelled across Siachen in summer period towards the Chinese Kashgir . Under

British Raj the snow frontiers of India were never truly demarcated; McCartney Line and McMahon Line were partially agreed upon with China. In 1947, when the British left and Pakistan and India took birth, the area was part of Kashmir & Jammu State. People of Kashmir overwhelming Muslims revolted against the Maharaja's decision to accede to India rather than Pakistan, resultantly the First Kashmir War 1947-49, took place. When the ceasefire was signed on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1949 at Karachi, between Pakistan and India, the area north of NJ 9842, a belt of 60 miles, was not demarcated, it was left as it is, 'due to inaccessible mountains and glaciers'. The two ceasefire agreements after the 1965 and 1971 Wars between Pakistan and India, again overlook the actual demarcation in area north of NJ 9842.<sup>17</sup>

Frontier north and east of Skardu is mountaineers heaven, every year from 1951 onwards foreign mountain expeditions arrived in Pakistan, got the permission to scale peaks around K-2 and this practice is still in vogue. Native Balti being the son of soil are the natural guides and porters, Balti are short in height, very stout, cheerful, hospitable, poor and reserve in nature. It

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<sup>17</sup> Cheema, Pervaiz *Pakistan's Defence Policy ,1947-58* {MacMillan,London,1990} also see Razvi, Mujtaba *The Frontiers of Pakistan,a study of frontier problems in Pakistan's foreign policy* {National, Karachi,1971}.

was during one of the expedition in 1980 that local porters brought back few cigarettes empty packs which were made in India. In mountain and snowy area like Skardu, soon these rumours reached local police officials , who investigated the reports and informed the local army brigade about the findings. In 1982, a platoon of Northern Light Infantry{NLI} was tasked to find the veracity of these reports; reports were confirmed. Thus on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1982, military operation directorate{MO} of Pakistan Army , directed SSG to carryout patrolling in area Goma; patrolling was carried out and also planned for next year with better logistic preparation . In July-August 1983, SSG carried out the reconnaissance & patrolling of the Siachen Glacier. As a matter of fact, a visual contact was established with Indians who were on the other end of Siachen Glacier and probably had come for the same purpose as were the SSG, it was later confirmed in an helicopter reconnaissance carried out on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1983 with Commander SSG on board. The findings and recommendations of the SSG patrolling were , that passes or La as in local language leading into Pakistan from Siachen must be kept under own control. These passes or La are the only humanly possible way to cross across the Siachen Glacier into Baltistan from Indian



side. Important passes include Bilafond La {butterfly pass} Sia La {wild rose pass}.<sup>18</sup>

Siachen is the largest glacier outside polar region, having length of 72 Kilometers, with width varying 2-5 Kilometres, it is a frozen river with high rugged mountains astride whose peaks remain under snow year around. In summer, the ice starts melting into water rivulets but there is no life other than the few shrubs of wild growth at the mouth of glacier. Black crow a resilient bird, too have a limit, uptill 12000 feet. Skardu is the confluence of two river, one originating from the northwest or from Baltoro glacier, within this sixty odd miles long glacier, many other glaciers join in like Godwin Austin which originates from the K-2 . Thus Shigar river is initially known as K-2 river, and it is only when it flows into Shigar valley it assumes the name of Shigar river. The other river which flows in from northeast frontier and joins the K-2 river at Skardu is Indus; water coming from Siachen glacier joins and flows into Indus river. Siachen and Baltoro glaciers are separated by a mountain saddle , The Conway Saddle at 19000 feet.

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<sup>18</sup> Azam, Cheema, Madni, *History of Pakistan Army Aviation 1947 – 2007* (Army Press, Islamabad, 2007)

Siachen glacier itself lies in a west-east direction, its head is at Conway saddle and tail is Nubra River. On the descending northern frontier of Siachen glacier, there is a pass Indira Koli which allows caravan of porters movement into China. On the southern frontier which concerns the main operations of the army and SSG , there are small glaciers like Kundus, Chumik, Gyong, Bilafond which are wedge into Siachen glacier , these smaller glaciers are further linked to the main civilisation at Skardu through intermittent small valleys. The passes or La that lead into the Siachen glacier from smaller glaciers are Sia La at 18,610 feet, Bilafond La at 18,310 feet, K-2 La at 21,000 feet, Gyong La at 18500 feet and Yarma La at 19000 feet. All combat actions between Pakistan and India have taken place over Siachen , in these eastern glaciers K-2 is the main landmark, it is the head , the small opening at its base provides a descend into China which surprisingly is absolute barren and a desert. Astride K-2 moving eastward is Broadpeak and Hidden peaks dead ends cluster of snowy mountains, a saddle{Conway Saddle 19700 feet} thus provides the only viable crossing over into the Siachen .

### **1984 –Race for the Passes**

SSG had planned to be in place in April 1984, one SSG battalion and two companies were placed undercommand , Force Command Northern Areas {FCNA}with its headquarters at Gilgit, 200 kilometres

south west of Skardu. The approaches to Siachen , initiates from Skardu in every sense, the lone town then to have an air strip , which with passage of time have at present heavy commercial jets landing. At that time there was no metallic track leading towards Siachen, the small hamlets at Khaplu delta, from where the two approaches initiate, one towards Sia La through Dansum, Kurmunding, Kundus and Sia La. The other approach through Goma, Ghyari and Bilafond La. SSG troops concentrated at Dansum in March 1984, on 17<sup>th</sup> April , prior to patrolling of SSG, army headquarters carried out an helicopter reconnaissance in order to update the information, it was found by the pilots that Indians are already in possession of the Sia La and Bila Fond La passes leading into the Siachen Glacier. SSG was thus immediately moved within three days to prevent any further intrusion of Indians into the subsidiary passes leading into Skardu valley.

SSG thus established posts at Yarma La {19,500 feet}, Gyong La {19000 feet}K-12 La , Liaqat La {later renamed as Yaqub by NLI } and also established post at Conway Saddle. There was one platoon of SSG a section of NLI and a platoon of Mujahids which were for portering purpose at Sia La approach, where as Company strength of SSG alongwith NLI was manning the Bila Fond La.

**In 1985**, 3 Commando Battalion had one company at Gyong La and 1 Commando had one company at Yarma La where as Sia La and Bilafond La were being manned by NLI and Azad Kashmir Regiment troops. In July 1985 less one company all SSG troops were withdrawn and all SSG posts were handed over to NLI troops; the SSG company was placed at Goma.

Siachen and these glaciated posts offer a new dimension to the military history, it was unprecedented in history of warfare thus the experience gained by troops and especially by SSG is a valuable addition in understanding the snow warfare. First and foremost were the logistics, the equipment required for operating at high altitude was quite short, thus initially it was bought from open market in Gilgit and Skardu later contracts were signed with leading firms and high quality equipment was given to the troops. The snow equipment mainly comprised of snow goggles, they are important as a constant glare of snow can render eyesight blind with acute pain. Gloves and socks were vital, troops learnt that frost bite is more fatal than anything else, and usually the fingers of hand and feet are the first to be affected. High altitude tents and fibre covered shelters were introduced in late 1986. For heating the only viable arrangement was the kerosene burner of varying grade and quality. The drawback was that the smoke from burner would blackened the white kit thus making an

obvious target in white background of snow. This black smoke was highly injurious for lungs as well, cooking was carried over once a day on it, ice had to be melted and heated before drinking. In a classical pattern, this expedition was different from any other mountaineering expeditions, first the occupation of the glacier had to be year around thus living and operating in winter was unprecedented.

Logistics were carried forward from Skardu to Goma, and then on mules to forward posts, from where the soldiers would carry it to the posts and observation posts; army aviation helicopters were also inducted. New helicopters like Lama were purchased exclusively for the Siachen and 5 and 8 Army Aviation Squadrons play a key role in this conflict.

### **Quaid Observation Post- 1986**

In May 1986, Quaid Company of SSG replaced the Ghazi Company, on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1986, the Quaid Company was tasked to establish a posts on the right shoulder of Bilafond La; company was able to establish the desired posts by 26<sup>th</sup> July and named it as Quaid Post and Quaid Observation Post. Ghazi Company had already established two major posts on the Bilafond , known as Rahber I and II; now Quaid Post act as the vanguard of the Bilafond glacier. Quaid Post{QP} was

in three segments, the base at the foot known as Quaid base, the post itself which was on a ledge involving a rope climb of thirty ropes, and finally the Quaid Observation Post{QOP} which was at summit, 200 yards higher than the post itself. It would take a commando 11 hours to reach the QP from the base and another an hour and half to reach the QOP. This movement from the Ghazi post to the Quaid post and further scaling was in observation and firing range of Indians, thus movement was in low visibility time period. QOP was mounted daily from the post, the commandos would descend down at sunset to post.

During the winter of 1986, in November, the weather became hazardous to an extent that company commander recommended abandonment of the post or proper shelter to be arranged as the number of casualties at post due to weather were increasing day by day. The recommendations of the company commander were not agreed upon, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1986, Lance Naik Muhammad Nawaz died on the post due to sickness, to further compound the situation havildar Iftikhar lost his way between the posts due to blizzard, his dead body was found a day later . Thus on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1986, Quaid observation and post itself were withdrawn.

Kamal Company moved in end November to relieve the Quaid Company and they took over the charge of Quaid base but observation post was occupied

on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1987; in May the Shaheen Company took over from Kamal Company in the routine changeover. The SSG companies were on a rotation period of six months each.

The first attack on Quaid observation post came on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1987, in broad daylight, however it was repulsed with enemy leaving behind seven dead bodies; resultantly Indians established a camp 400 yards down the Quaid observation post. On paper it looks very easy to think about a post mere hundred meters away but in Siachen, with over hanging cliffs and ledges covered with snow and having crevasses and moraine , this distance was not a piece of cake. Indian resumed their attempt to capture the Quaid observation post, on 17<sup>th</sup> June they started shelling the target, own post was manned by one junior commissioned officer and eight soldiers whereas at the Quaid Post there were 11 soldiers undercommand an officer Captain Zaidi of SSG.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1987 Indian 4<sup>th</sup> Jammu & Kashmir Battalion supported by artillery opened fire on the post, Indians had made full use of their MI-17 transporter helicopters who would stack the heavy load near front line from where Cheetah(Lama) helicopters would transport them to the edge of glacier.

As a routine, the replenishment would take place almost every week in winter. Porter parties would start

from Ghazi base camp with few packs of edibles, fresh items if they have arrived in any of the helicopter and most importantly the letters for the troops and to deliver the posts from the post. Posts were dumped in summer, yet the letters remained the major source of morale for the troops. On the night of 23/24<sup>th</sup> June, one soldier had fallen acute sick , doctor advised to lower his altitude thus he was being taken down from the QOP; it was arranged that same men will collect the letters also for the QOP from the post. As the luck would have it, one soldier got his laces broken, his shoe also got free and the soldier slipped down from the ropes into the crevasses. The soldier's life was saved but in the process the wire communication with the observation post and with base was broken and as such now Quaid Post was without any link either with the post or with the base. Enemy shelled the post and OP on the 24<sup>th</sup> June, which was intensified on 25<sup>th</sup> as well. At 0800 hours on 25<sup>th</sup> June, an attack was launched on the Observation Post which was repulsed , but due to shelling, the wireless set at the OP was destroyed so were the line communication with the post below. At evening , the situation was , that at the main post there were 15 soldiers , one officer and three dead bodies, where as at the OP, Naib Subedar Atta was also wounded , he had four soldiers with him at the OP.



Early in the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> June, enemy started shelling the OP, at 1000 hours communication was established with the OP by the post, it was conveyed by the OP that they are dangerously short of ammunition. The irony was that the replenishment party which had set from the base was hit with aerial artillery bursts from Indians, it further delayed the replenishment. Meanwhile at the OP, precarious situation had developed in which Subedar Atta was now hit with a shell , he thus lost his arm, ammunition had been finished, two soldiers while repulsing the assault, slipped down and fell into the crevasse . Thus Subedar Atta was the last man holding the OP and in the end he too embraced martyrdom. Observation Post was lost .

An immediate effort was launched to recapture the lost observation post, Ebrahim Company was air lifted on 10<sup>th</sup> July to reinforce Shaheen company, tactical headquarters of 3 Commando battalion along with Yaqub company were also airlifted from Kamra to Skardu on 24<sup>th</sup> July.

### **Operation Qiadat- September 1987**

The plan to recapture Quaid Observation Post was modified into capturing of Bilafomnd La itself by the commander SSG, however it was modified into capturing of the vital posts of Rana and Akbar on the left

mouth of the Bilafond La, on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1987. In the first week of September, 3 Commando made its plan for the capture of Rana Post, this post was initially with own troops however it was captured by Indians in 1986 from NLI troops. Powindah battalion was supported by Ghazi Company{ 2 Commando Battalion} also.

These two posts rana and Akbar located at a height of 19000 feet are not straight in line with each other rather a Saddle joins them. Both had sharp gradients towards own side but gradual slope on the enemy side. The operation to capture these posts was code named 'Operation Qiadat'.

All available and additional resources in the form of Puma, Allouette-III and Lama helicopters were mustered. From 1<sup>st</sup> July 1987 onwards Army Aviation started logistic buildup which included shifting of guns, ammunition, fuel, mortars, anti tank rockets and heavy machine guns. Helicopters were tasked exclusively to transport and airlift artillery guns and artillery ammunition to the forward locations. Allouette-III and Lama helicopters were the main flying assets to shift stores, artillery pieces, ammunition and other equipment ahead of main bases. A 120 mm mortar was slung and transported by Lama to Camp-II area ahead of Ali Brangsa along with its ammunition;. even TOW were helilifted to Rahbar Post at 16,000 feet.

On 17<sup>th</sup> September, 1987, SSG troops were concentrated, which included Ebrahim Company at Rahbar base camp, Ghazi Company and one combat team of Yaqub Company at Ghazi Post, the battalion tactical headquarters was also established at Ghazi Post. The initial attack , planned to be launched on night 20/21<sup>st</sup> September had to be postponed. Army aviation helicopter dropped the orders of delay , by wrapping the message around a stone.

22<sup>nd</sup> September 1987, the operation was launched at 1030 hours in the morning by hitting the enemy bunkers , first TWO hit enemy bunker at La position, second one missed the bunkers at Akbar and third one narrowly missed own forward troops. The planning of any operation, especially recapture of any post is simple in every sense. There are no variable routes or alternate positions available. There is only objective, to reach the top in the first phase, and then assault the main bunkers in the second and final phase. Whereas the first phase to some extent can be planned by higher officer, the actual assault phase is the domain of the assaulting officer and troops for the reason that none had any idea of the layout of the post. This lack of knowledge was not a major factor, as everyone knew that the size of the post is as such that it had no other option but to pitch tents on whatever space is available.

In the evening at 1825 hours assault commenced on Rana by Captain Nazaratt and his team, two hours later heavy snow blocked his advance. The SSG teams , Major |Sana , Captain Shoukat , Captain Imran were between the Rahbar and the post; Captain Rashid Malik was the fire base commander. At night certain changes were incorporated in the plan.

At 0500 hours 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1987, Captain Nazaratt and Captain Imran along with their men were 150-200 yards short of Rana Top, which in terms of time it can take almost half day . As soon as these SSG men started coming out from the cover and started their ascend, they came under enemy fire and thus whole day the small attacking team was pinned down. More reinforcement moved from base camp , Major Sana and Captain Shoukat troops while climbing Tabish were hit upon. Captain Salik Cheema who had also climbed to evacuate a casualty was ordered to reinforce Captain Imran, which he managed to do so at 1700 hours. Thus at dusk, the entire ridge line from Tabish onwards had SSG troops. Indians brought the artillery air bursts and machine gun fire on the ridge line. SSG responded back, thus a requirement for ammunition replenishment, Captain Iqbal and Captain Afridi carried the ammunition from base camp and became part of the assaulting force. Meanwhile, Captain Waseem at base camp was tasked to

find an alternate route from Rahbar to Tabish, which he did with his men and also fixed the safety ropes.

At last light, Captain Shoukat and Nazaratt again started their climb towards the objective, plan was, Captain Shoukat to establish a fire base with one combat team, while Naib Subedar Rashid to manoeuvre from right so as to suppress the enemy fire from Akbar Post and La Bunker. Captain Rashid Malik to also manoeuvre from right under the cover of fire, where as Captain Iqbal and Captain Afridi to manoeuvre from the left and Captain Salik Cheema to approach the bunker complex frontally, close onto the bunkers. Captain Imran's task was to approach the bunkers from left and reach near the Rana Top. To cater for ammunition expenditure, Captain Najam was task to carry the ammunition with his men, he did so and by 2000 hours he reinforced Major Sana.

On 24<sup>th</sup> September at first light the operation started. Progress was slow but it was inching upwards, at such heights both defender and attacker have certain advantages, as a defender, the height, observation and the certainty that attacker can only climb upwards from this one direction only , is a great advantage. Attacker although besets by the low altitude , can still close in by making use of the blind and dead spots offered by the boulders. It was the final ascent which was important, it can only be made by using the extreme resources of own body's depleting energy, sheer will power, very high

state of morale and a good amount of luck. Captain Salik Cheema imitated the assault and finally reached the top, where he and his three men were hit with enemy fire, they returned the fire but soon took their last breath and embraced martyrdom at the top mere yards short of the objective.

On the other side, Captain Rashid Malik was able to establish a fire base at 1900 hours from where he can support the ascend of Captain Iqbal and Captain Afridi. Captain Iqbal was hit with enemy fire at close range but he still managed to knock off a bunker with rocket launcher. By 0200 hours, there was a close proximity fire going on at the top. Space was not enough for both attackers or defenders to manoeuvre, thus fire exchange kept going on. Indians launched a fiery counter attack by bringing fire upon 'own position' . At 0430 hours, Captain Najam was able to link up with Captain Iqbal, however a volley of machine gun fire took the life of Captain Iqbal. All in all there were thirteen dead bodies and twenty five own soldiers were wounded. Thus own troops descended down to 200 yards , Naik Anwar was the last man to descend . At first light the overall situation was almost similar to what was the position three days earlier, however in this time period the 3 Commando Battalion had suffered twenty shaheed and 115 wounded. The further descend was equally

dangerous due to enemy fire , thus at last light 26<sup>th</sup> September 1987, own troops started descending down,

### **Kargil – 1999**

Kargil in the summer of 1999 became a headline world over, Pakistan and India fought a small limited war in June 1999. The Kargil War was in fact a continuation of past, the small mountainous town was first captured by the Pakistan in 1948 and became the extreme extent of the freedom movement which was initiated with the Operation Datta Khel { Gilgit uprising of November 1947}. In 1965 a classic commando raid by SSG at Dras resulted in numerous casualties to Indians. After the stalemate in Siachen in 1988, military planners in Pakistan started pondering over indirect approach, the most logical being, to cut off the logistic tail of Indian forces at the Siachen Glacier itself through interdiction on Srinagar-Kargil- Dras Road.

Almost identical thoughts were being hatched by the freedom fighters of Kashmir, who after the popular uprising in the held Kashmir in 1989, had become more independent in finding the solution through armed resistance. Unlike 1965 uprising in Kashmir which was sponsored by Pakistan, the unrest in Kashmir in nineties was more indigenous and home grown. These mujahedeen in the early summer of 1999, surprised the

Indian troops at Kargil, who after the winter, when tried to re-establish the vacated posts; found the Kashmir mujahedeen in place. These three vital posts were now controlling the traffic on the main route, rather the lifeline to Siachen Glacier. Throughout the month of May 1999, Indian army tried its utmost to recapture the lost posts but in vain. On 28<sup>th</sup> May 1999, a serious setback to Indians occurred when they lost two MIGs aircraft, very next day they lost a MI-17 helicopter as well, all three due to ground fire by mujahedeen. There has been an unwritten convention between the two countries, not to use the air force in Kashmir and across the Line of Control {LOC}, with this act of India, Pakistan Army was now morally free to fight the war as it suits . SSG troops manned the LOC, Liaqat, Shaheen and Kamal companies took part in the operation. Kamal Company was deployed in Chohar sector, Shaheen Company in Batalik sector and Liaqat company in Gultri sector. The SSG has the credit to carryout successful mission during the conflict, Captain Ammar was decorated with Sitara-i-Jurat posthumously for his act of valour in Kargil.



## **Chapter V**

### **Special Service Group; War on Militancy**

#### **An overview**

On the eve of the war, SSG had only three battalions with a strength of 2000 all ranks, organised in a brigade, with an amphibious company Musa, Para training school at Peshawar and an anti-terrorist company Zarrar. However after a decade and half, at present it has over 6000 all ranks, with nine commando battalions, organised into three brigades and stationed in four garrisons. The operations itself can be categorised into five phases.

In first phase which lasted from January 2003-December 2005, the operations were carried out under the directive of military operations {MO}, focus was on North and South Waziristan Agencies. 11 Special Service Brigade was raised, Karrar a rapid strike Force was also raised, 3 Commando battalion was transitioned into Special Operation Unit {SOU}, a new commando battalion 4 Commando was raised. In the second phase which lasted till from January 2006-April 2009, three new commando battalions, 5, 6, and 7 were raised as a new brigade {22brigade}. The thrust of operations shifted to Baluchistan and Swat apart from operations in

Waziristan. In Phase III, which begins from May 2009 – February 2010, the commandos were employed against miscreants in Buner, Swat and mainly in South Waziristan Agency; Zarrar Company was merged into Karrar Company, and special operations task force was transitioned into a new commando brigade {33}. In phase IV, which is between June 2012-June 2014, SSG carried out operations in Orakzai, Kurram, Swat, Buner, Khyber and Waziristan with minor surgical operations in Frontier Regions of Peshawar and Kohat. The present phase which is in true sense a final phase to get rid of miscreants initiated in June 2014 in which North Waziristan, South Waziristan, and Khyber Agencies were flushed and piece restored. Apart from these major operations, the hostage rescue missions at Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Peshawar have been carried out.

181, brave sons of SSG have laid their lives in the defence of motherland in last decade and half. Eighteen officers, fourteen junior commissioned officers and 155 soldiers have been martyred, with another 304 being wounded {22 officers, 11 JCOs and 271 soldiers} and 32 disabled for the life which includes one JCO and 31 soldiers. Nation has acknowledges the sacrifices of SSG by bestowing 443 operational awards, Sanads and commendation cards. Thirty commandos have been awarded with Sitara-e-Basalt and 181 have been decorated with Tamgha-i- Basalat.

Special Service Group in the recent past have taken measures and steps to help the families, financial grant, accommodation in the cantonment, jobs for next of kin, schools have been opened in all the SSG cantonments where boarding and day scholars are being provided with high standards of education at subsidised rates, state of art hospital, better living conditions for all ranks, organisational adjustments in which concept of 16 men combat team is cardinal and above all a rigorous training regime to overcome the shortcomings and to meet the future challenges. Special Operation School has been inaugurated which not only imparts training to own officers and soldiers but also to friendly countries as well.

Joint training exercises have been conducted with American, British, Chinese, Turkish, Russian, Saudi Arabian special forces. No less than one thousand own troops have undergone various courses and refreshers abroad. At present, 15300 commandos have undergone training in 137 different courses run by SSG in the year 2016 alone; overall SSG have the distinction of conducting the highest number of students in Pakistan Army. Despite the war and the losses , SSG in its true tradition have kept the culture intact. The gathering and reunion of veteran commandos and guerrillas takes place every alternate year, grand durbar a unique institution of SSG is still alive, fierce competitions are still taking

place in the sports field, officers are still dined in and out in traditions so unique to SSG.

Special Service Group is now an airborne division with three brigades, capable of undertaking missions in conventional and non-conventional conflicts; the interaction with other arms and especially with Army Aviation have increased the lethality of SSG to manifolds. In very near future another two special brigades for mountain and desert operations are to be raised, squadron of gunship and utility helicopters alongwith a squadron of fixed wing aircraft are also to be integrated into the organisation of SSG.

SSG on the eve of new millennium was in the process of finalising its organisation and structure to meet the new threat. The recently concluded war and skirmishes in Kargil and Kashmir had strengthened the hypothesis that SSG will be performing the same tasks as in previous conflicts. A reorganisation of SSG had been initiated after 1971, in 1974 and also in 1978; but somehow the other it was never finalised due to economic constrains. On 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1994, the proposals for reorganisation of SSG was finally approved by the GHQ. The existing organisation revolved around having four companies and a headquarter company, all in all a

strength of 606 all ranks. Company the basic brick of SSG was having 128 all ranks. In a commando battalion there were 20 officers, 19 junior commissioned officers, 57 havildars and 441 ranks and file; apart from these men there were 19 clerks on the strength of a battalion. The battalion had 64 vehicles also. All in all the SSG was having three battalions with a strength of 1704 all ranks. The fighting unit of SSG is the platoon, and a platoon had three commando teams. Commando team therefore is the basic brick of SSG; it needs bit of elaboration. In each commando team was led by a havildar with a naik as his deputy, four commandos operating light machine gun, two operating the rocket launcher and two riflemen. Surprisingly there was neither the cook nor the sweeper authorised to the commando battalion or the company; a makeshift arrangement was made under the 1966 rules. The only major step taken forward was the establishment of the Special Operations School .

The 9/11 incident came as a jolt and took everybody by surprise. On 7<sup>th</sup> October 2001, the war in Afghanistan begun with aerial bombing, by first week of December the Taliban government in Afghanistan was over thrown. By the end 2001, Pakistan Army had established the blocking positions on the likely routes of Taliban entering into Pakistan. SSG one company was also part of the force which was keeping an eye on the

Tora Bora pass. In the meantime, the situation on the eastern border had necessitated the deployment of SSG with field formations. Commandos of 1 Commando Battalion, for instance spent a month in Gujranwala and surrounding areas practicing heliborne operations and Heli-repelling with army aviation squadrons.

It was in 2002 that the first smoke of the insurgency detected in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas {FATA}, where the very first such mission was undertaken under the code name Operation Tight Noose. SSG and Army Aviation for the first time became an integral force, although both corps had been highlighting the catalytic impact it will have on operations if they act together but , it was never really put into practise. One reason was the lack or shortage of helicopters. In 2002-2003, American helicopters {Bell 412} were inducted, also a high number of Russian helicopters {Mi-17} were purchased. A new concept of Special operations task Force {SOTF} emerged in which both commandos and aviators practised the battle drills extensively. A battalion size composite force was raised, 3 Commando Battalion was elevated to the status of SOTF, new , modern equipment was given to the battalion. Simultaneously a new commando battalion 4 Commando Battalion was raised as an Air Assault Commando Battalion.

In the year preceding to the first operation, dawn, dusk and night operations were practised , in which a battalion size force was helilifted from Qasim Base and dropped near the Attock and surrounding areas , aim was to integrate the drills. The general officer commanding , of SSG and Army Aviation, Major General Faisal Alvi and Major General Muhammad Azam deserves special mention for preparing the force. Interestingly Major general Muhammad Azam was also the colonel commandant of 19<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment. Another much needed step, was the elevation of commander SSG from one star to two stars rank.

SSG in the first decade {2003-2013} conducted no less than 187 operational missions. The period itself can be classified , in first phase 2003-2009, SSG missions were controlled by military operations directorate{MO Dte}, later SSG carried out operation undercommand Peshawar Corps { 11 Corps}, alongiwith these missions there were certain tasks which SSG carried out as a formation. After 2003, apart from 4 Commando Battalion, four more commando battalions were raised, these battalions were later formed into three Special Service Brigades {SSB}. In terms of area of operation, 75% missions were conducted in the seven tribal agencies {FATA}and remaining in Swat and few operations in Northern Areas of Pakistan. The high point of SSG operations is ‘Operation Peo Char’ in Swat area,

for the first time the complete SSG Division was employed in flushing out the terrorists and miscreants. It was a Heliborne operation of unprecedented form, for the first time in sub continent such amass number of troops and helicopters were employed successfully.

Apart from the organisational changes at higher level, certain tactical changes have been incorporated in the operations of SSG. The previous ten member combat team has now been altered to fifteen men since 2014. Training doctrine has been upgraded to cater for new challenges, anti-terrorist training has now become an integral part of all commando courses, sniper training is now given a top priority. The doctrine of training at company level is now replaced by a central training regime under which the individuals are now trained in specific crafts by the SOS {Special Operations School}, presently, in 2016, no less than 187 courses and cadres are being run for training, scale of ammunition for training has ben enhanced.

SSG trained no less than sic light commando battalions, which were later affiliated with the SSG Battalions, thus Baloch regiment is associated with 1 Commando, Punjab with 2 Commando, Frontier Force with 3 Commando, 4 Commando is affiliated with Azad Kashmir , Sind Regiment is affiliated with 5 Commando and Northern Light Infantry is affiliated with 6 Commando Battalion.



The long war has taken its toll on SSG, in order to raise the morale of the commandos , many steps have been taken, new accommodation for troops alongwith family accommodation has been constructed, but more significant step is the construction of two new schools , one at Cherat and other more grand is the Manjanbazam Cadet School and College at Tarbela. SSG provides free accommodation and education to all the children of shaheed. It must be kept in mid that till 2006, all children used to travel no less than 86 Kilometres each day from Cherat and 44 Kilometres from Attock to get education at army run schools in nearby cantonments.

### **Federally Administered Tribal Area {FATA}**

The centre of gravity of all operations , FATA is 600 kilometres long tribal belt with a width not exceeding 130 kilometres, it is along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border which is more commonly referred as the Durand Line, an agreement between the British and Afghanistan dating back to 1893. FATA covers an area of 27,200 square kilometres which is 2.6% of Pakistan's total area, FATA have a population of 5.6 Million people. It is divided into seven tribal agency namely, **Khyber {1879}**, **North Waziristan Agency {1900}**, **South Waziristan Agency {1900}**, **Kurram Agency {1899}** were the original political agencies under the British raj. There were few more political agencies in Baluchistan as well. After 1947, **Mohmand** political

agency was raised in 1951 followed by **Bajaur** in 1973 and **Orakzai** Political Agency also in 1973.

These political agencies are unique political entity, they are semi-autonomous, where the life and laws are based upon centuries old customs and traditions. The common factor among all the political agencies are language {Pashtu} which is spoken with different dialect in each agency, religion is overwhelmingly Islam, only few of the tribes { Turi, Orakzai and Bangash adhere to Shia faith of Islam , all other follow Sunni doctrine}. Each political agency have a Militia known as Frontier Corps. All these agencies have unique cultural and tribal structure, thus each agency should be treated independently .

Swat on the other hand was a princely state , it acceded to Pakistan in 1947 and later in 1969, all princely privileges were abolished by Pakistan. State was always considered non militant in nature.

Special Services Group were inducted in the war from the onset, company of 3 Commando battalion at Siachen was airlifted from Skardu, after landing at Peshawar , it was taken to Kohat where it stayed for next three months; end of 2001. In these three months, the mission was still not very clear, it was only after American invasion in Afghanistan in December 2001, that the issue of Afghan Taliban entering and staying in

Pakistan became the core issue. In 2002, as the bulk of SSG was deployed against the likely Indian incursion on eastern borders thus, only one battalion 3 Commando was spared for keeping an eye on the western borders. Same battalion later became Special operations task force {SOTF} thus the early experiences of war on western frontier is more or less the history of Powindah. After 2005, the other commando battalions were also integrated into the operations.

Three platoons of 3 Commando were airlifted to USA for initial training on the modern way of commando warfare. The training itself got started on wrong foot; it was Ramadan and Captain Tariq 'Tikki' and his men were fasting, the American trainers pointed out this as a violation of SOP, Captain Tariq's point of view was simple, train as hard as you can, as long as I can last, I will keep the fast, where I think, that I cannot cope up with it, than I can break the fast, but from the onset do not make it an issue. In the end, the platoon came back without training; after Ramadan the new platoons were sent to America for training. This incident have certain lessons, the first and foremost, that cultural and religious values are an integral part of human and as such they have to be respected. In mid-2000, the American training team came into Pakistan; for any successful operation in Afghanistan, a sustained support from Pakistan was vital for the Americans and other

western allies. Initial training was conducted by Americans at Kohat and later the training centre was established at Tarbela.

SSG and Army aviation were two most vital component in this war on militancy; thus a joint SSG and Army Aviation base was constructed and inaugurated in 2003-2004. A new company Karrar was also raised, especially for operations in built up areas, later this company was made part of Zarrar Company.

3 Commando, after Kohat moved on to Wanna for likely operations. In the last quarter of 2002, there were rumours and intelligence reports about a certain group of foreigners hiding in close vicinity of Wanna. In the early days of the war, the main aim was to hunt and capture the Osama Bin Laden, the mentor of Al Qaeda, thus all operations invariably were taken with this aim; either for his capture or his allies and close confidants.

In Wanna, the situation and local people were still not hostile, own SSG persons would go to bazaar in civil dress and buy the usual items. The local intelligence network of tribes is quite efficient and they soon pick the routine of military. There were usual movement between the Wanna and Islamabad in connection with American trainers, there were vehicles provided by American with dark glasses that would roam between the two cities. One day Captain Naveed of 3 Commando was

approached by a local tribesman , ‘ I was walking in the bazaar, when he approached me and call me by rank, and offering a handsome amount of money, so that his own vehicles can ply with us , he was a smuggler but it highlights the kind of intelligence these people have’. He further highlights that , ‘we were wearing the uniform of Frontier Corps, I somehow had the uniform of a naik rather than that of an officer.’ The first operation conducted against the Taliban was on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2002 known as ‘ Operation Tight Noose near Angoor Adda.

### **Operation Tight Noose 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2003.**

The very first operation of newly raised SOTF was conducted six Kilometres south of Wanna at Bagar Cheena area. The operation was a well coordinated and based upon intelligence reports,, highlighting the presence of over thirty hard-core Taliban; however the exact figure of the Taliban was not confirmed. Karrar Company for the operation constructed a model village in Tarbela , to depict the target and for well over two months extensive training was carried out. ‘ we carried out a deep planning and rehearsed the likely unfolding of events , to an extent that we could predict that at such and such precise moment, the target would be exposing his left shoulder to the sniper’. Reconnaissance of the target had commenced on 20<sup>th</sup> August, another reconnaissance was carried out very next day. During the

reconnaissance phase the commandos were shown the houses and the compound to be attacked.

On the operational night, the force moved out from Wanna in military trucks, passed through a village and debussed almost two miles short of the compound. An infantry battalion laid the outer cordon along with the 3 Commandos, and Kararr were to pass through this cordon and assault the compound.

Naib Subedar Muhammad Akhtar then a naik narrates ‘ for well over two months we practised the new drills and tactics at Wanna,, it included boarding and getting down from helicopter in a tactical manner, laying of cordon and assaulting the mud compounds, daily there were classes in which we were given lessons , by using blackboards and then practising what has been taught...there was a great anticipation among all of us, we were looking forward to see the action . We were organised into assault teams rather than platoons, within our company Sepoy Qaiser was leading the prayers. In the morning we were informed about a likely operation at night. After Isha prayers we all mounted the vehicles. Havildar Liaqat was our assault team leader, it required two vehicles for one team. We reached our designated target area at 0400 hours, it was a moonless night. We walked from our debussing point towards the target, each team would occupy its designated area and then informed through wireless about its in position. The

target itself, a mud house compound, had a small garden or orchard in front, as soon as we reached the orchard the first fire came upon us from the watch towers. My team took cover behind a broken wall and returned the fire. Kararr team in the meanwhile had reached the walls of the compound, scaled it and were inside the compound.

The compounds and villages in Waziristan are different in design and layout from the standard villages of Punjab, Sind and other parts of frontier. They are made of mud, thus the rocket launchers for all practical purpose lose their lethality. Walls themselves are twenty feet and higher, a compound is in fact a family house in which all members of an extended family live together, having different mudhouses inside the compound, these rooms are interlink, have narrow door and an occasional window. For army or SSG it was not a difficult task to simply raze the mud compound, or bring an artillery round, but it was the concern for the safety of the women and children which prompted such elaborate preparation and caution.

At dawn, the commandos were able to see the whole area of operation, there were trenches in the orchards from which occasional fire was brought upon the commandos. 'we shot, one Taliban who was firing on us from the bunker, there was still one man who was causing nuisance for my team. At noon Karrar company carried out the assault, six terrorists were killed in the

encounter, at the same time, the encircled terrorist tried to break the cordon by firing and running. Sepoy Qaiser was quite nearby, he was the first one to get the fatal bullet from the terrorist, Qaiser died on the spot. We also killed the running terrorist. The sporadic firefight continued till the evening, after Maghrib prayers, operation was called off and Karrar company was ordered to clear the area, it was during this phase that Sepoy Ishtaiq was hit by a bullet and he embraced martyrdom. In the end two terrorist were captured alive, one of them hailed from Sheikupura{Punjab}. Later at night we marched back to a predesignated place, an infantry battalion had established the outer cordon, we had meal with them , and slept a little.

In the morning there was a darbar by commander SSG Major General Faisal Alvi who praised all commandos. During the day, Cobra attack helicopters were also employed to attack the compound, a final combing of the area and compound was carried out on 3<sup>rd</sup> October as well by Hamza , Zikriya and Karrar Companies .

**Operation Kalosha** was another operation carried out in Wanna {South Waziristan Agency}, It was conducted on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2004. Primary aim was search of foreign militants in five mud compounds, intelligence reports had highlighted the presence of 40-50 foreign militants. The standard standing procedures now evolved



includes an outer cordon by an infantry and inner cordon by commando battalion and finally the search and clearance by the Karrar. After encirclement of the compounds, announcement was made on speakers about the intention, thus all women and children { 25 in number} came out and stayed in open. Artillery and Cobra fire was brought upon the compounds at 0930 hours. At 1100 hours the search and clearance started and was over by 1330 hours. *‘Although the operation met no success but it was a good real time exercise and the unit and sub units were able to practice their drills and procedures in actual environment’.*

**Operation Zarkai -23<sup>rd</sup> February 2004.** An operation almost similar to the two previous operations, basing upon the intelligence reports of foreign militants present in the area. It was an exclusive SOTF operation and no infantry battalion was employed for the establishment of cordon. Also it was the very first operation which was Heliborne, all the force was helilifted from Mianwali in three waves. In the first wave, nine MI-17 helicopters airlifted 185 commandos of 3 Commando battalion to establish an outer cordon; by 0700 hours the target village was easily cordoned without any resistance. The second wave of six Mi-17 helicopters landed near the target area, 115 commandos of Zarrar and Karrar companies were in position by 0730 hours. The announcement was made on loudspeakers,

this time lady searchers were also part of the raiding force, in order to ensure that no militant escapes under the veil cover. These lady searchers, Frontier militia , infantry company and political agent arrived at the target area in vehicles. Operation terminated at 1430 hours without any major or worthwhile prize, only two local armed men and four Kazakh women were apprehended. Commandos observation were ‘ *intelligence agencies are exaggerating the presence of high value targets and miscreants*’.

**Operation Shakai-11<sup>th</sup> June 2004.** Operation at Shakai in SWA was a major operation in terms of troops and the helicopters, a wholly SOTF operation, in which 3 Commando and Karrar Company took part, there were 15 MI-17 helicopters, supported by four Cobra gunships and a UH-2 helicopter acting as aerial command post.

As the helicopters came in for landing, they were fired upon, thus one Mi-17 with two combat teams of Karrar had to divert to Wanna from where the combat teams were later dropped at evening. The maximum fire was coming from the northern ridge{ pt9715}, this was unexpected development, teams had to sent to eliminate this menace, which they did successfully. There was one 14.5 mm single barrel gun which was causing all this havoc, after the ridge was overpowered, it was found and

deduced that not more than five militants were on the top.

The search and clearance of the compound and the adjoining area revealed nothing as only one vantage rifle .303 was captured alongwith some ammunition. For a more precise destruction of the target area , an air strike was called which came at 1630-1700 hours strafing and bombing the northern ridge line . Troops camped in the near vicinity of the target , during night, illuminating artillery rounds were fired , the militants attempted twice to attack the camp but failed. Next morning {12<sup>th</sup> June 2004} the day started with own air strike on the compound area and searching and clearing by the Karrar company which they were able to do so by 1500 hours. Meanwhile a link up was established with the 8 Punjab regiment, they now took over the cleared compounds under their control. The SOTF had to spent the night again , on the ridge lines. On 13<sup>th</sup> June , the ridges were searched again for any miscreant , a single cabin with a 12.7mm gun mounted was located and destroyed. By mid day all 15 compounds were searched and cleared without finding anything worthwhile ; deinduction started at 1430 hours and was successfully completed by 1615 hours. SOTF later realised and stressed that , clearance and search mission should be completed with in a day, irrespective of darkness, rather than spending the night in the target area. Another bitter

lesson was that, such operations can last longer than planned, therefore food and other arrangement which includes batteries for the wireless sets should be carried in sufficient numbers.

### **North Waziristan Agency**

After the operation in Angoor Adda, the focus of SOTF shifted towards Miranshah, between 2003-2005, no less than a dozen such operation were carried out in the vicinity of Miranshah. Army took the operational control of the political agency in July 2005, prior to it, the political agent and the Tochi Scouts were the main strength of the state. American training team and small group of soldiers were also accommodated in the Miranshah, in the vocational training institute. Thus Americans had the high technology setup, from where the intelligence was gathered and later passed on to own troops for action. Actions were deliberate and thoroughly planned.

**Tande Obo** a small village on the outskirts of Miranshah, approximately 18 Kilometres north east, having a madrassah was the target. Intelligence reports gave the impression of foreigners being trained in the Madrassah. On 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2004, SOTF troops were Heli landed short of the target area, a company then secured the landing area, after the experience of previous operations, securing the landing zone became a priority.

As usual the outer cordon was established by 3 Commando and Karrar Company carried out the search and clearance of the target. The Karrar assault team was hit by the miscreants' fire resultantly Captain Arshad Iqbal was hit and wounded. Such sporadic fire, retard the speed of the assault teams and allowed the miscreants to make an attempt to escape through the cordon. Miscreants hiding and blending with the ground , were good marksmen , thus two more soldiers of SOTF were wounded, Havildar Niaz Ahmed and Naib Subedar Mir Dad had to be evacuated to safety area. All captured arms and ammunition was destroyed by the SOTF and troops were helilifted from target area and were back in Tarbela by 1930 hours.

**Lawar Mandi** is a small village , 55 Kilometres west of Miranshah, astride the Durand Line. On 14/15<sup>th</sup> January 2005, a major operation was carried out, no less than 12 MI-17 helicopters having support of four Cobra gunships participated in the operation, 3 Commando Battalion and Karrar Company were heli landed in the snow covered area. The one major lesson that had emerged so far from the operations conducted was the requirement and necessity of having a close coordination among the commandos and aviation element. Thus the whole force had spent the night at Qasim Army aviation base , where last minute details were ironed out. The cordon force took off at 0600 hours on 15<sup>th</sup> January and

they established the outer cordon, which started squeezing and finally by 0800 hours it was in position. Karrar Company landed at 0845 hours and immediately started searching the village. It was one of the very first and perhaps the only mission in which American also participated, albeit in an indirect manner. Five American gunships were hovering inside Afghanistan and own four Cobras were inside Pakistan , thus eliminating any chance of any miscreants making good with escape. Seven compounds were cordoned and people ask through loudspeakers to vacate the compound, ‘everyone started vacating the house without any retaliating and surrendered peacefully’, leaving the women and children, twenty men were apprehended and taken to Bannu. All compounds were then searched but nothing objectionable was found

### **NWA post July 2005**

On 5<sup>th</sup> July 2005, army took the operational and political control of the political agency, from this date onwards the operations also took a sharp turn in terms of conduct and more importantly the resistance increased manifolds to the operations. Sometimes one minor incident acts as the ignitor or catalyst. Immediately after taking control, army carried out clearance operations of the city and the surrounding villages. On the night of 17/18<sup>th</sup> July in an unfortunate incident, few of the local women and children were killed in such encounters,

which changed the overall attitude and mind-set of the native population. In the following days , strong speeches and demonstration were held in the city, pressing for the eviction of American troops in Miranshah; in the end the Americans were taken out and replaced by a company of 4 Commando Battalion.

**Noor Payo Khan , 1<sup>st</sup> March 2006.**

The operation at NPK, is considered to the first Direct Snap Action {DSA} conducted by SSG, although minor operation was carried out on similar pattern at Dera Ismail Khan a year earlier. For NPK , six Mi-17 helicopters, five Cobra attack gunships and two Bell 412 helicopters were employed. SOTF was divided into two groups, Karrar and Ebrahim Companies each had six combat teams , whereas two companies of 1 Commando battalion were incorporated. Cobras softened up the target with missiles and heavy cannons, starting at 0730 and lifting the fire after ten minutes. In the first wave Karrar and Ebrahim company landed on the north east and south of the target compounds. Operation lasted for two hours.

NPK compound is located Dande Killi, couple of miles north east of Miranshah. It was stressed by the intelligence agencies as the main hub of Taliban training and a centre of insurgency, presence of miscreants was definitely expected and it proved true. The initial strafing

by attack helicopters took the Taliban by surprise and quite a number were killed inside the compound. The miscreants who were outside the compound offered stiff resistance to the landing troops, two soldiers of Karrar Company suffered bullet injuries seconds after landing. Karrar true to its name fought through the fire, reached the compound, breached its gate and entered the compound. They searched the half a dozen rooms but found nothing extraordinary other than usual cache of arms and ammunition.

Ebrahim company also landed simultaneously , but on the southern edge, they were also under heavy miscreants fire, regardless of the fire, they provided fire support and cover to the assaulting Karrar teams .it was a daylight operation, thus by 0945v hours the companies were helilifted from pick up zone. The major catastrophe was avoided at the pick up zone, two rockets hit the landing Mi-17 Helicopter, pilots despite the fire and the fire within the cockpit, managed to take off and land safely alongwith troops at Miranshah. 3 Commando battalion suffered one shaheed and 15 other as wounded.

### **Minor operation in and around Miranshah**

Apart from the helilanded operations, a string of minor operations were carried out in the surrounding areas of Miranshah. The city itself had a periphery of posts located on high ground, like Sarbandkai, Banda,



Amin to name few. SSG officers were detailed and task to lay ambushes and raids on the Taliban vehicles, convoys and commanders. Captain Qamar Aijaz carried out one successful ambush near Chashmai Bridge in July 2007. SSG now with passage of time, opted to detach one company on duration, to be attached with each of the infantry divisions operating in North and South Waziristan. A major pause in conflict also arrived with the signing of peace pact with the Taliban in North Waziristan Agency; furthermore the drone attacks were achieving the similar results which were expected from a raid or ambush by SOTF.

### **A Sepoy's Narrative**

Sepoy Shams hails from Mirpur Khas in Sind, his parent arm is artillery, in search of adventure he joined SSG and passed out in 2006. *'After my wing ceremony, I was posted to 1 Commando battalion, I reported at Attock fort, along with five other commandos who have recently passed out. Two days after our joining the battalion, we moved to Miranshah by road. First we reported at Bannu, from where a convoy was operating on every Sunday between Bannu and Miranshah. For next one month I was in Miranshah, Americans were still present and one of my main duty was to act as the sentry in the compound. After a month, one fine morning we were told that we are leaving for Parachinar. We boarded the helicopters and soon we were landed at*

*Doabba, short of Thall fort. Now there was a change in mission, we had to move to Jandola in South Waziristan Agency.*

*We were a combination of two companies Liaquat and Kamal, Major Jawed Bhutta was the company commander, our mission was to spearhead the advance of the infantry division, leading to the home village of Bait ullah Mahsud. As I was the new comer thus I had to carry the maximum weight which included the light machine gun and its ammunition. Sepoy Waheed , myself and naik Shahbaz who was our team commander as well were leading the advance of our commando company. The company itself was divided into two groups, with each group having twenty odd commandos, we were visual to each other. The going was tough, as we reached a ridge, the very first fire came upon us, this was the very first enemy fire of my life, I have no hesitation that for a moment it unnerved me, I took cover behind a boulder. The heavy luggage was a hindrance in swift movement, we passed the information to the company which was at the base of the ridge; the fire was effectively coming over them also. Sepoy Waheed had also joined recently, in a rush of blood, he moved forward to assess the situation , immediately he was shot; he now thus was lying wounded almost fifteen meters away from the cover, his weapon had fallen away. I called him and told him to crawl backwards so*

*we can help him out, but he was more worried about his weapon and refused to crawl back without the weapon. Naik Shahbaz then dashed forward and drag him into safety. But Sepoy Shahbaz had taken his last breath. We now, cleared the ridge, it was a pair of snipers who had halted our advance. We split the weight of the shaheed and in turn carried his body. I once rolled down the ridge with the body, my uniform was now torn and wet with the sweat and blood. We finally managed to reach our designated high ground without any further incident. We could see the village down below. Next day, we had to travel good distance of over fifteen Kilometres so we can hand over our shaheed body to the waiting ambulance which had arrived under armed escort. After three days at the ridge we came back through the same track , there were two donkeys which we found at the ridge, we decided to use them for own transportation of luggage. Surprisingly, the donkey refused to carry any load more than ten Kilogram, we knew the weight specification of each of our pack, since I was the donkey handler, thus the moment I will add any weight over ten kilograms , donkey will simply sit down and no matter how you kick him would not walk unless the extra weight is taken off him. Reason which our senior subedar gave was that this donkey is a water carrier and as such used to carry only ten kilograms of weight and as such is reluctant to carry any extra load. stayed with the*

*division for three more months rather than the three days as planned earlier.*

*From South Waziristan Agency, we were taken to Orakzai Agency. In the Orakzai Agency, the militants had burnt the house of Sikhs at Samana ridge thus for the protection of Sikhs we had to move. Captain Hamza Bin Tariq was our platoon commander, we searched the house but found nothing in them, we stayed for over a month at Samna ridge. We were taken back to Doab, from where we move to Bannu and stayed for fifteen days before moving back to Para training School at Peshawar. At PTS we were told to practise an ambush, most likely we will be laying n ambush on vehicles of Muslim Khan, Sufi Mohammad and Fazlullah’.*

### **Pash Ziarat, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2007.**

The operation was conducted in the Pash Ziarat area, which is north of Razmak, it is a ridge line which covered the track movement going from Razmak to Manna. During British ear three posts were constructed on the ridge line known as Alexandria, Duncan and the Pash Ziarat Post. Unfortunately the post itself was lost to Taliban by the army and frontier corps. Now the mission assigned was the capture of the post itself and destruction of the training centres of Taliban .The main ridge known as Rocky ridge have a length of 800-900 meters running in west-east direction, it was heavily

fortified by Taliban in anticipation of the intended attack; it was situated 400-500 meters north of lost post. The Pash Ziarat Post was located on the north of Razmak-Mana track where as the Khassadar Post was situated on the south of Pash Ziarat Post along the Razmak-Manan track. A compound of Taliban was reported to be in the base of Jamiat Ridge which was dominating both the Pash Ziarat and the Khassadar Posts. Own forces comprised of 122 soldiers, three junior commissioned officers, five officers, two artillery observers, one medical orderly and four sappers, all in all 138 all ranks.

On 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2007, the force was gathered at Miranshah and move to Razmak, the initial plan was offset by the weather and as such delayed for a day. Twenty men each were dropped from helicopters at the ridge three Kilometres short of the objective{ Pash Ziarat } before the last light. As soon as the landing was accomplished, the Razmak airfield acme under intense attack from the Taliban from the surrounding and dominating hills , this thus overruled further insertion of troops in the target area. The dropped force occupied a hideout and spent the night.

On 13<sup>th</sup> September, at 0900 hours, two more forces were dropped at the ridge, the two forces later joined together at what was known as triangular feature. Whole day the firing duel with miscreants continued,

with own troops trying to establish a foothold. Next day, a further force of 60 soldiers was dropped close to Mana, they after landing establish contact with the already dropped troops. Meanwhile, the miscreants close the circle around the first two parties; night was spent fighting with the Taliban; it was now decided to break the cordon of Taliban and establish contact with the own troops at first light. The contact with own troops was established at the first light, at this stage after assessing the situation, it was decided to capture the Pash Ziarat Post. Firm base was established and reconnaissance of the target was carried out, but they were taken by surprise when at 1830 hours the force found itself being surrounded by Taliban . Now it was a battle for survival, thus the force was divided into four groups , each fighting its own battle and trying to break the cordon of the miscreants

On 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2007 at 0500 hours the physical assault was carried out by the Taliban, a hand pitched battle ensued, miscreants were pushed back to thirty odd meters from where behind the cover the fire fight continued. Now it was decided to disengage from the battle and find a way out; after seven hours of intense and sporadic fight, own troops started disengaging from the confined area, they were able to extricate themselves and by evening the battle was over. SSG suffered the highest casualties in the current war at Pash Ziarat,

fifteen soldiers embraced martyrdom and twelve more were wounded. Two soldiers of 3 Commando Battalion were able to re-join the battalion after few days. They were wounded and had to escape using their wits through the Taliban territory.

### **Swat , Operation Rah-e-Haq -2007-08**

Operations in Swat in earnest started from the mid October 2007 and continued intermittently till 2009. 3 Commando battalion was in position at Kanju fort since 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007. The Taliban offensive which was launched on 24<sup>th</sup> October targeting the police and para military organisation did achieved its aim, by 7<sup>th</sup> November 2007, Taliban were in control of Madyn , Kabal and Khawaza Khela tehsils and towns. In the second week of November, Taliban tried to wrest the Shangla District, which is on east of Swat. This advance was checked by own army and Taliban were pushed back into Swat; by end November , Taliban went underground. Close battles were fought between the infantry and the Taliban, finally in February 2009, a peace accord was signed between the Taliban and the government. Soon this peace pact was broken by the

Taliban when they abducted four commandos who were under cover, they later killed all of them. As a result a final push was launched in Swat which ultimately cleared the Swat state from the menace of militancy. It was in the last phase that SSG launched its two major operations to capture Peo Char valley.

During the winter 2007 phase, Powindah were employed to restore the morale of own troops, in one action, Captain Arif was able to recapture the Kabal police station from the Taliban , impromptu targets were also neutralised by the quick reaction force {QRF } of 3 Commando Battalion. Capture of Najia and Usmani tops , two dominating features overlooking the route to Dir were captured by a combined force led by 3 Commando alongwith 6 Azad Kashmir , 28 Sind and 15 FF regiments

Lieutenant Colonel Zafar Niazi, a ‘golden dagger’ commando, commanded 1 Commando Battalion{2014-2016}, narrates.

*In 2007, I was commanding the Ayub Company {1 Commando} undercommand Lieutenant Colonel Mumtaz, my company was placed at Mingora, battalion headquarters were at Kabal; Captain Hussnain and Captain Hussain were the other two officers with me at Mingora. My company was located at the circuit rest house, few miles outside the city. The 17 Division was*



*about to launch the Operation Rah-e-Haq, as such we were task to clear the approaches of advance and clear the city of miscreants.*

*There were sixteen such targets, these were men identified by military intelligence as 'black' and having sympathy with Taliban. First task was to identify the house of these miscreants, the situation in city was as such that no army personal could move with security, it was practically under the control of Taliban. For target reconnaissance myself and a captain from military intelligence, would disguised ourselves as poor beggars, wearing dirty kameez shalwar, which I really had to make dirty by playing volleyball in them, with bathroom sleepers as the footwear. My major disadvantage was that I could not speak Pashtu, although I could understand. After three such runs, in the last run a day prior to the actual raid on these houses, myself and the intelligence captain alongwith a company commander of 18 Frontier force{FF} went on reconnaissance. It was bit frustrating as the company commander was also a Punjabi and even when he spoke Urdu, the Punjabi accent was too visible and obvious. I confirmed the sixteen house to the intelligence officer and made final plan for an early morning raid.*

*At night , the company was briefed, teams were earmarked, we were operating on ten men team at that time, I made six combat teams. Early on the morning*

*before Fajr prayers, my company was in position, they had the light ladders with them, the procedure was that one team would take cover and provide the fire in case it si required, the other team would assault the designated house. I went into two such houses, I knew the opening sentences in Pashtu, when the door was opened, I would inquire about the person required, by and large all of them gave themselves up without any resistance. In one of the house, the son of the wanted man , a young boy, who seems to be very attached to his father cried bitterly, I consoled him that , I will make sure your father comes back alive, I also gave money to the boy , to buy books for his studies. Meanwhile 18 FF had established the outer cordon, they had an exchange of fire with militants in which two militants were killed. My own commanding officer and that of 18 FF were also present .*

*Later the brigade gave orders to demolish the house of all miscreants, there was no issue, but the last house belonging to Akhunzada Sher Durrani , was adjacent to the mosque, and there were chances that mosque may also get damage; thus in the last, the house was left intact. I called the elders of the area, Mashr, for a Jirga. Main aim was to have a human shield in case of suicide bombing, I noticed many people among the gathering wearing the Servis company's Cheetah sports ankle high shoes, a trademark of Taliban.*

*It was now, 0900 hours, brigade gave us the intelligence warning that Taliban has planned an ambush on our convoy. There were only two routes out from the area towards our own camp. One passing through the city, same route on which we have come, other was the bypass road of city. I opted for the main route, although it is against the teaching to have same route for entry and exit, but intelligence report had highlighted that ambush is on both routes. Advantage of main route was that the road was good and wide enough to allow us to sped our way back home.*

*Our convoy now consisted of the two commanding officers and my company, as we sped our way, we had reach the midway in the city when fire came upon us from the side streets and from top of houses. My troops returned the fire with such ferocity and accuracy, that Taliban were forced to fire without any aim, fifteen bullets hit my vehicle, thirteen hit the vehicle following behind, almost every vehicle received bullets. There were only two fatal casualties, Havildar Ramzan was hit in the head, a bullet pierced through his safety helmet, other bullet hit the Akhunzada Durrani, whom we gave medical treatment but he died.*

Major Rizwan , presently the second in command of 4 Commando Battalion, further highlights the operations in Swat area. The 4 Commando battalion was inducted after the deinduction of 1 Commando. ‘ My

*battalion{ Yalgaar} was at the Mingora, city had gone back under the control of Taliban, 37 Division had replaced 17 Division, and a final push was underway. My company was earmark for clearing the approach route. The companies and battalions of the division were under siege at their respective locations, so much that even helicopters were unable to land in the area. We were running short on ammunition and food, there was no way to evacuate the casualties to safety. As a first step we cleared the nearby mountain ridge to enable helicopter landing. Later we were to occupy and hold the Banda Dheri plateau. It was a dominating feature in the approach.*

*We marched at night and linked up with a company of Baluch regiment at Kanju, few hundred meters away and on a higher ground. After a day spent in reconnaissance, we decided to occupy the feature before first light, thus combat teams were finalised and at first light we were in possession of the feature. The Taliban counter attack came at 1000 hours, they opened fire with long range weapon and in the cover of fire tried to reach the feature, but we foiled their attempts. They resorted to mortar bombing, there were trenches and overhead foxholes present at the feature made by the Taliban. However we remained in open , for the reason, in case we took cover than they would have assaulted the feature. Captain Zahid was the first one to be hit with the*

*mortar splinters, he became unconscious due to excessive bleeding. I alongwith my men now occupied the same position, and soon myself and six men were hit with the mortar splinters, another officer came for our rescue but he was also hit with splinters. Despite all these adverse environments we still held the feature and by evening, as the division advanced the Taliban also retreated and we were able to have some respite. Later under darkness we marched back to the Kanju , from where we got few charpoys, put our wounded commandos on it and then marched sixteen Kilometres to field dressing station . As far as my own injury is concerned, the fact that when it hit me, I felt no pain neither I realised that I have been hit, it was after four or five minutes that I felt acute pain and saw my blood dripping . The best part is that operation was a success and I alongwith my men and comrades kept the battalion izzat intact.*

### **Operation Peo Char , 24<sup>th</sup> May 2009.**

The final solution of unrest in Swat was in carrying military operation, flushing out the Taliban and their supporters , to destroy the training centres and hub of militancy; above all to take a moral ascendcy in the campaign by hitting at the very villages of the so called leaders of militancy. 1 Commando Battalion alongwith company each from 3,5 and 6 Commando battalions were employed in the first phase. A series of operations

were carried out, to clear the valleys of the menace, Pio Char -2 was launched on 26<sup>th</sup> may, followed by operation to clear Dob Banda Valley on 29<sup>th</sup> May{ an exclusive 6 Commando Battalion operation}, minor operations to clear adjoining valleys in the first week of July known as Tilligram, Sir Killi and Badr Colony, finally the ‘Last Nail Operation’ in which 2,4,5,6 Commando battalions and two companies each from 1 and 3 Commando battalions participated, making it the largest SSG Operation in the history of the group and that of Pakistan Army. A through planning and good leadership resulted in having only five fatal casualties and thirteen injured soldiers in the entire month long campaign . Pio Char was planned in a meticulous manner, a Darbar was held at Attock fort in which the General Officer Commanding SSG Major General Haroon Aslam addressed the commandos, raised the morale and wish them a success in the operation.

Lance Naik Shams narrates ‘ *Before the darbar, all mobile phones were deposited, at night we move in trucks from Attock to Ghazi air base, where at first light we took off, I was part of the tactical headquarters as an intelligence operator, my job was to keep the maps updated. We had to jump from the helicopters at the target area,, some commandos would jump with the load , other would first throw the pack and then jump. It was a long ridge, immediately after landing we rolled and*

*took cover behind the trees. The designated companies and troops then moved down the valley, soon second wave of own troops landed in similar pattern. There was sporadic fire coming from the miscreant, but it was accurate. By evening our own sniper detected the Taliban sniper and neutralised him, he was on a tree. I myself alongwith the khateeb of the battalion had taken cover behind the tree, when we moved forward, a bullet hit the trunk of the next tree, thus we both jumped into a water tank. At the top there was a hut alongwith the water tank, we made our tactical headquarters in the same hut. Myself and khateeb thus remained in cold water for well over an hour and then we decided to get out , other wise we will freeze to death . We just bolted out in two different direction without any fire coming on us. We were being provided with fresh food, which we had to pick from the road head. Thus we in the headquarters would march down, collect the haversack, and then at a predesignated point we will distribute it among the representatives of deployed companies. Presence of the Major General Haroon on the same ridge was a morale boosting factor.*

Operation Zarb-e-Azb, 2014-2016

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2014, ten militants attacked Jinnah International Airport at Karachi, 28 people were killed; that was the starting point of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. In the first phase extensive aerial bombing was carried out on suspected hideouts of militants in North Waziristan Agency, at least 140 militants were killed. Subsequently ground operation was carried out in the NWA which was regarded very correctly as the hub of all militancy in frontier region. Initial plan which was presented by SSG revolved around helidrops of SSG {11 Special Service Brigade} on the southern heights of Panekzai, Humzoni and Boya Degan area, later it was decided to concentrate all efforts in clearing the Miranshah city

4 Commando Battalion undercommand Lieutenant Colonel Adnan Bashir , was given the mission of clearing the city, 5 Commando battalion was tasked to clear the adjoining areas of Tapi Tol Khel and Dande Darpa. Over 400 compounds were searched and cleared by 11 SSB, major explosive factories were detected and destroyed. Most important was the moral ascendancy which own troops gained over the miscreants. For long , since 2005, Miranshah had been a no go area for own forces and own troops were practically besieged within the mud walls of the Tochi Scouts fort. No vehicle could proceed to Bannu other than on Sunday, none could even move freely within the



perimeter of the fort , however this operation took the initiative away from miscreants.

4 Commando Battalion, in the first phase employed their snipers with great effects, these snipers would take down anything moving in the streets of the ghost town. Captain Abrar who carried out the physical search of the town, later highlighted the fact that the layout of washrooms and toilets are different in each political agency. The search and clearance of the town was a nerve wrecking experience, a town famous for manufacturing of IEDs had to be neutralised and it was carried out without any major loss. 5 Commando Battalion on the other hand, secured the adjoining heights , these heights in the past have been the sites from where rocket attacks were launched into the fort.

### **Boya –Degan {7- 25 July 2014}**

After clearing the Miranshah, the SSG troops advanced towards the west, next objective was the securing of road Miranshah- Panekzai-Humzoni-Ahmad Khel-Boya.-Degan uptill Khar Kamar Two commando battalions, 5 and 7 were given the mission to clear the area, these areas , especially area ahead of Boya was the stronghold of Gul Bahadur a militant commander, also the Wazir tribe territory starts truly ahead of Boya. 7 commando cleared Ahmed Khel where as 5 Commando Battalion cleared Ghazlami. 7 infantry

Division was the overall formation in charge of NWA, it had apart from 27 and 88 Infantry Brigades, the 11 SSB also under its command, thus at times commando battalions were placed undercommand infantry brigades but majority of the operation they were undercommand 11 SSB.

7 Commando Battalion during the operation was ambushed at Ali Khel but it managed to get out of the block, in the action, two commandos Lance Naik Tariq and Sepoy Siddique embraced shahadat. Finally on 8<sup>th</sup> July Usman and Haider Companies were able to link up with a NLI regiment at Boya .

In the next phase, two commando battalions {5&7} cleared the road from Boya to Degan. The area as such was divided into six sectors and clearance operation was carried out meticulously , villages like Sani Khel, Land, Mohammed Khel, Fazal din Kot and finally the Degan itself was cleared. In Degan, over 160 compounds were searched by Khalid, Harris and Mujtaba Companies. There were no own casualties in this operation.

5 Commando later move further westward, sanitizing Khar Kamar, Ghazlamai and Kani Rogha, mission was accomplished by 16<sup>th</sup> July and area was handed over to 46 Frontier force Regiment.

### **Retrieval of 30 Sind regiment Shuhada**

A section strength of 30 Sind Regiment had suffered casualties in a firefight with militants in Ahmed Khel on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2014. Commanding officer of the Sind Battalion made the request for SSG reinforcement for retrieval of his dead bodies. A company of 4 Commando and two companies of 7 Commando battalions took part in the operation, four Cobra gunship helicopters and two Bell 412 also took part in the operation. The dead bodies of Shuhada were lying in the bed of Tochi River. In the initial phase of this operation, Havildar Muhammad Mustafa embraced shahadat while Naik Shahadat got injured. Operation after a brief pause was again initiated after last light. Commandos of 4 Yalgaar volunteered and retrieved the dead bodies from the mid stream. ‘ my men were deployed facing the river, and providing cover to the retrieving party, all of a sudden , a single shot took the life of Captain Akash Rabbani, he was hit by a sniper shot...later we searched the area and found the militant sniper, our sniper then shot him...the major threat were these hiding snipers, who were well conversed with the terrain and as such inflicted casualties on own troops.’ recalls commanding officer of Yalgaar. Apart from havildar Mustafa , captain Rabbani, Sepoy Waqar of Yalgaar also embraced martyrdom.

By 14<sup>th</sup> August 2014, the area around Boya was sanitised , troops and SSG battalions in a gesture to win hearts and minds of locals also distributed food and

sweets among the children, Commander Brigadier Bhutta {11SSB} also met the local maliks and local population.

### **Intelligence Based Operations {IBO}**

Between 23 August-4 September 2014, few successful IBOs were carried out by 5 and 7 Commando Battalions in the Saidgi Valley, the valley itself is in north east of Miranshah. 5 Commando Battalion remained on the east of the main water channel whereas 7 Commando battalion was on the west of stream; both battalions carried out sanitization simultaneously. Local population was warned before hand to evacuate the area, a Jirga was also held with local maliks to minimize the casualties.

### **Khyber Agency**

After the cleansing of the North and South Waziristan, the militants took refuge in the highlands of Khyber Agency most notably in Tirah Valley. In October 2014, the preliminary operations started in Khyber Agency in which 2 and 4 Commando Battalions were deployed. 4 Commando was the main punch in Bara Valley where as 2 Commando Battalion was operating in Kohat, Bannu and Peshawar areas mostly carrying out intelligence based operations. 4 Commando operated under and with Mahsud Scouts {1<sup>st</sup> October-25<sup>th</sup> October 2014}, with 115 Brigade {26<sup>th</sup> October-18<sup>th</sup>

November 2014} and with 124 Brigade {19<sup>th</sup> November – 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014}. Most remarkable was the ambush carried out by Quaid Company on 8/9<sup>th</sup> November near Peshawar, to apprehend the high value targets who were escaping from the area after strikes by PAF jets.

## **Khyber II- Post Army Public School Operations**

The prime target was Umer Narai of Lashkar Islam was operating from Tirah valley, thus Operation Khyber II was aimed at his capture and destruction of the entire training and command system of miscreants. 11 Special Service Brigade { 2 and 5 commando battalions} operated under 21 Artillery division {19<sup>th</sup> March- 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015}. 4 Commando battalion undercommand lieutenant Colonel Jawad Bhutta was given the task of clearing the inaccessible parts of Tirah Valley. The plan mainly revolved around clearing the Tirah/Dwa Toi axis and Bara Valley simultaneously employing three infantry and 11 SSB. In a broad term, 11 SSB to lead on Dwa Toi axis with 26 Brigade on heels, it was called as the western axis. On eastern Axis the 53 Brigade operated along Kidney Ridge, 124 Brigade operating north of Bara River with 4 commando battalion along the Durand Line, passing through Musatil Pass and Painsa China Village.

11 Special Service Brigade after accomplishing the mission , was further task to sanitize in Shaikan,

Tarkho Kas, Nagharo, Javed Killi and Tor Dara, these operations started on 18<sup>th</sup> May and terminated on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2015. 4 and 6 Commando battalions participated in these operations, combat helicopters were also on call. The sanitization went as per planning, however the arms recovered were not impressive, one 12.7 mm ,only five rifles were found which included one 12 Bore as well; on the other hand ammunition were captured in high quantity.

#### Shallow Cut- July 2015

In the summer of 2015, the battle again came back to North Waziristan, miscreants after loosing all the safe heavens were reported to be concentrated in Shawal valley, south of Miranshah. The Shawal Valley is bounded by Datta Khel in north, Road Razmal-Kanigram on east, Shakai Valley in south and Durand Line on west, there are series of mountains ranging from 7000-11000 feet, dotted with thick vegetation, undulating ground and seasonal nullahs. The tops were all held by miscreants namely Makki Garh, Darra Narai and Point 2965 and Point 3243. Builtup area comprised of mud huts, prominent were Lawara Narai, Punga Killi, Rwe Ware, Palgal and Zawar Killi. Intelligence reports highlighted presence of 150-200 miscreants in the area of operations, the main strength of the miscreants was in

the ability to muster reinforcement from their strongholds of Gurbaz, Manna and Punge.

22 Special Service Brigade under Brigadier Mumtaz having 4 and 6 Commando Battalions { these battalions move into the area after successful operations in Khyber Valley} was given the mission of clearing these areas. The initial reconnaissance was carried out by Lieutenant Colonel Shahid Aziz and his second in command Major Adnan, Brigadier Mumtaz and Lieutenant Colonel Jawad Bhutta. Two infantry brigades namely 106 and 107 were also in support of the commandos. By evening of 4<sup>th</sup> August all reconnaissance was completed including that of Pash Ziarat. Later the SSB was placed under command 9 Infantry Division. While the reconnaissance was in progress the respective companies and tactical headquarters of the battalions also move into Shawal Valley, camping in Razmak Cadet college. The task of SSB was to infiltrate deep into the hostile territory and occupy the tops; it was known as the Northern prong, while two infantry brigades were employed , one each on central and southern prong. SSB had to link up with the central prong by the last light on third day after the start of operations. As a deception , a company {Saad} was move towards the Angoor Adda.

On 19<sup>th</sup> August 2015, operation started at 1700 hours when the battalions reached their jump off point.

First objective was the Point 2973 and Point 2885. Move was in darkness, navigation in mountainous terrain is a difficult task in daylight and becomes hazardous in hours of darkness; same was experienced during this move, companies did get strayed but soon regained their original bearings. Lieutenant Colonel Shahid took a timely tactical decision by separating two combat teams and straight heading for the designated target; large body of troops was hindering the swift march. It proved correct as by morning the battalion had reached and captured the first objective Makki garh.

Taliban reacted swiftly by launching a counter attack to recapture the lost ground but it was repulsed by the battalions, another arid was repulsed on 22<sup>nd</sup> August . For another week, the battalion held the position defying all attacks of Taliban, meanwhile 4 Commando Battalion also reached its objective Wucha Darra without encountering any worthwhile opposition. During the later half of operations, the IEDs took their toll, Captain Basharat Fareed, Havildar Nabi, Havildar Mushtaq , Sepoy Aftab and Sepoy Aatim Masih all were injured due to blasts, Naik Nazakat of Essa Company {4 Commando} embraced shahadat on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2015 due to an IED blast.

### **Campaign Plan- 2016**



In 2016, 11 Corps planned to evict all miscreants from the uncleared areas of North and South Waziristan Agencies. Operation was code name as Campaign plan, it was launched in the month of March. It had two prongs, one Prong I, 22 SSB{6 and 3 Commando Battalions} lead the advance with the mission to clear area from Kundi Ghar till Zoe top; while on second prong 1 Commando Battalion was earmarked for advance to clear area from Sir Garh till Taimora Village. Both prongs thus had to join at Taimora in first phase; the link up had to be in position by 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Subsequently both prongs had to advance forward till they join each other at Baiza Feature, at the latest by 15<sup>th</sup> April 2016, finally in the end the commandos had to advance till the Meman Punga by 30<sup>th</sup> April. After clearing of these areas the 22 SSB in the final assault was task to occupy the Shaga Sharkai by 30<sup>th</sup> May 2016. The major villages and pocket of resistance was expected at Dabbar Miami, Dabari, Mana and Gurbuz. The area of operation itself is bounded by Mira Din in north, Road Wanna- Angoor Adda in south, Villages of Dabbri Miami and Aasman Punga in the east and Durand Line in the west. There were two infantry divisions, one on each prong, the SSB was undercommand 9 Infantry Division, whereas 1 Commando Battalion was undercommand 7 Infantry Division.

The advance was not an easy task as no less than 300-350 foreigner fighters were reportedly present in the area. The important passes of Maghrotai and Zoe –Narai were vital as they allowed the miscreants to get reinforcement across the Durand Line.

Operation unfolded as per planning and troops achieved the desired results, reconnaissance started from early February when commanding officers of 3 and 6 Commando battalions alongwith their officers undertook the reconnaissance. They did come under miscreants attack and fire on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2016, however own snipers quickly neutralised them. On 26<sup>th</sup> February, 3 Commando undercommand Lieutenant Colonel Sajid Malik moved from Wanna, the plan was that Hamza Company will lead the battalion as assaulting company followed by Yaqub, Ebrahim and Zikriya companies; they were able to capture the objective by 0200 hours 27<sup>th</sup> February through deception, chivalry and by surprise.

6 Commando took over the operations from 27<sup>th</sup> February onwards and immediately they came under intense miscreants fire attack, it was a long night of hard fighting. In the morning the Taliban launched fresh attacks on the 6 Commando battalion, Havildar Zia embraced martyrdom and later the post was named after him; Captain Zafar, Sepoy Khalid and Sepoy Habib also suffered injuries in the battle. Lieutenant Colonel Shahid

Aziz was hit by miscreants bullets in abdomen while carrying out reconnaissance of the area and was evacuated. However the main objective of capturing the high ground and keeping it under own control was achieved.

Linkup between the 7 and 9 infantry divisions was finally achieved

## **Chapter VI**

### **Zarrar; Anti-Terrorist Unit**

In the late sixties and early seventies the face of special forces change in line with the threat. The Guerrilla movement of fifties now adopted the more urban facsimile. The realisation of making the international; headlines and there by forwarding their cause was more attainable in having prominent persons as hostages and through the hijacking of commercial airliner. It was the special operation at Entebbe in which the Israeli commandos rescued and retrieved the hijacked aircraft , thousand miles away from their own country. The failure of American special forces to freed the American embassy hostages in Iran ; it further humiliated the America. Pakistan itself had first such

scenario in March 1981 when Pakistan International Airlines {PIA} Boeing 737 was hijacked and taken to Kabul, hijackers in the end were able to get away with their demands fulfilled. Thus it became obvious that such anti hijacking operations are more politically based than the mere act of rescue.

In the wake of PIA aircraft hijacking, chief of general staff , approved the arising of a Reconnaissance and Special Operations Company, within the existing command structure of SSG. It was an urgent requirement and within a month Colonel Tariq Mahmood the commander of SSG, sent his proposals, and recommendations on the role and organisation of the company. Colonel Tariq Mahmood had the Entebbe raid in his mind, where rescue operation had to carried out on foreign land, secondly the aircraft, hijacking and anti hijacking was the scarlet thread of the company , above all the company had to be based within Cherat and Attock, manpower being taken from the existing commando battalions. In the General headquarters, the idea was threadbare discussed, the counter arguments of placing the company at either Karachi, Rawalpindi or at Lahore due to time involved in moving the company from Attock or Cherat was over ruled by Colonel Tariq Mahmood. There was another point which was raised during these session , that was to either have the helicopters being undercommand SSG and placed at

Peshawar or the SSG company being undercommand army aviation and placed at Dhamial. The company after necessary approval was raised as the Zarrar Company, with Major Khursheed Afridi as the pioneer company commander.

These aspects were still under consideration when the Indian Air Line Boeing on a routine domestic flight was hijacked by four Sikh passengers, hijackers were armed with kirpan and claimed to have hand grenades in their satchels. Zarrar Company with its full strength of 76 commandos was helilifted from Attock and Cherat by Army Aviation's Puma helicopters. It was a time consuming exercise, as helicopters had to fly on back-bearing, refuelled from Dhamial, and finally landed at 1800 hours at Walton airport.

Hijackers were amateurs as later remarked Colonel Tariq Mahmood. They had already released an elderly couple on humanitarian grounds, the couple was interrogated by local police to ascertain about the character of hijackers. Zarrar established a control headquarters at the Lahore Airport, the overall commander was Colonel Tariq, three teams were formed. Major Afridi alongwith Captain Safdar Alvi, Captain, Ali Zaidi, Naib Subedar Noor Muhammad and naib Subedar Usman formed the No.1 team. Captain Khawar, captain Rafique, Subedar haq Nawaz and Naib Subedar Shabbir Ahmed constituted the second team

under Colonel Tariq. Remaining fifty odd commandos were task to form a defensive perimeter and act as reserve. These two teams were the only commandos which had been trained so far by the Special Air service {SAS} at Cherat; training was still underway when the incident occurred.

Sikh hijackers were casual in nature, they would at times come down from the aircraft in pair, walk and chat with the negotiators, their demands were still not very precise. Hijackers allowed the catering to be continued, serving passengers with morning tea at 0430 hours. During the night, it was deliberated over the action to be taken; one option was to wait for the negotiations to have some result and second option was to overpower the hijackers. In order to again more knowledge about the hijackers , Captain Khawar disguised as a PIA caterer entered the aircraft along with another member of the team, there were three genuine caterers as well.

Hijackers main bluff was in claiming to have the grenades in their satchels; however Captain Khawar accidently touched the satchel and found it to be having rather soft touch, instead of metallic hard. Captain Khawar at once grabbed the hijacker from back, simultaneously his other team member Naib Subedar Usman got hold of the other hijacker. The third hijacker on the stairway in the meanwhile was casually standing

at the base of stairs, he was grabbed by the Subedar Haq Nawaz on the last stair. The remaining two hijackers , who were busy in the negotiation , when they saw their companion being grabbed simply gave themselves up to the administration, thus without firing any bullet or having any casualty to commandos or to the passengers the whole drama reached its end.

After this operation Zarrar popularly known as Jarri, went through extensive training with SAS, snipers were trained and drills were sorted out. The basic limitation remained in terms of time consumed in travelling out from the Cherat . The training in Zarrar differs from the other commando taring in a sense that , the anti hi jacking operations are centred towards the individual member rather than as a whole company. Within the aircraft, the space si limited for only a small team to operate at a time. Lack of any model or airport in close vicinity of Cherat was another major irritant in training the company to realistic standards.

Air guards. After the PIA Boeing hijacking incident, it was decided to have officers and men from SSG in every flight of PIA whether domestic or international, armed with a pistol , to act as air guard. Thus SSG was the very first modern organisation to act as Air Guard. The weapon remained within the aircraft on international flights. Air guard were under the command of the captain of the aircraft for the duration of

flight. This experience brought a revolution among the commandos. The knowledge gained through travelling across the world was immense in every aspect. Later SSG trained men of airport security Force{ASF} and these duties of Air Guard were handed over to them.

Two more hijacking of Indian airlines Boeing took place, first on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1984 and second exactly a year later on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1985. In both instances Zarrar Company was moved from Cherat, had to travel by road to Rawalpindi and then Heli lifted to Lahore. However in both cases, before the Zarrar could establish its control room the crisis were over and aircraft along with hijackers took off. The real test for Zarrar came on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1986.

### **PANAM Boeing 747.**

Bombay- Karachi-New York bound flight of PANAM, landed at Karachi international airport from Bombay at 0200 hours on 5<sup>th</sup> September, it was bound to John Kennedy airport at Newyork. As the captain and other crew took place with 386 passengers on board. A loud thump was heard and the airhostess rushed towards the cockpit announcing ‘ there are hijackers on board’. The crew locked the cockpit and announced to control towers about the situation; time was 0447 hours. Hijackers announced their identity as belonging to Abu Nadal group of Al Fateh, seeking to fly to Cyprus and



release of their fellow terrorists in Cyprus jail; to make their point clear they shot Rajesh Kumar a passenger and threw his dead body on tarmac. The hijackers stormed into aircraft wearing ASF uniform and driving through all security checkpoints using the ASF painted vehicle. The captain of aircraft is traditionally expected to be that last one to leave the aircraft under such circumstances , however the crew escaped down through the emergency hatch; leaving cabin crew and passengers at the mercy of hijackers.

Zarrar Company led by Brigadier Tariq Mahmood landed at PAF base Drigh Road, 1500 hours, drove to main airport and took positions, a control room was established where corps commander and Governor Sind were also present. There was no key information about the hijackers as regarding their number and weapons but it was taken as guaranteed that these hijackers are fanatical in approach. At 2000 hours, the orders for weather to take a military action or wait for the negotiations, was still being waited for , Brigadier Tariq Mahmood was in conference with the corps commander when he heard the fire shot , ‘ I rushed out and , I had already detailed the different teams, one team with snipers was observing the aircraft, two more teams were ready for assault, we had carried out the practise on the PIA Boeing 747 parked not very far from this aircraft. In the darkness and dim light of parking bay, I

saw passengers escaping through the emergency exit, both assault teams also rushed into the aircraft through the same exit door.’ SSG team overpowered the sole hijacker inside the aircraft, he had run out of the ammunition.

The hijackers were armed only with the automatic rifles, a chain of events made the hijacker lost their nerves, first in the absence of any flight crew they were stuck on ground, this consequently resulted in aircraft batteries getting low, which finally put the entire aircraft into darkness. When the lights were getting dimmed, the airport authorities tried to plug in the ground power supply, this movement coupled with darkness resulted in indiscriminate firing by the hijackers inside the aircraft. Neera Mehta the Indian airhostess, very bravely opened the exit door thus letting the passengers slide out, she herself was killed. All in all 22 passengers were killed and sixty five were injured. The hijackers were smart enough to mix up with these escaping passengers, all four were caught by the ASF while making good use of this mayhem.

Brigadier Tariq Mahmood in a post operation report, recommended that in future a psychologist should also form a part of team; in order to gain time and to assess the behaviour of the hijackers.

**Islamabad- February 1994.**

On 20<sup>th</sup> February 1994, an unusual but grave situation developed, three Afghan hijackers hijacked school bus at Peshawar, bus had 73 school children on board, they later drove the bus to Islamabad and parked it in front of parliament. Zarrar company was placed at Tarbela, where as the SSG headquarter was at Cherat. This the information was passed first to headquarters, which in turn at 1420 hours passed the orders to Zarrar Company. Immediately the officer commanding along with three soldiers left for Rawalpindi whereas the main body comprising 48 all ranks drove in buses and trucks. It was month of Ramadan and it rain heavily.

By 1730 hours when Zarrar was in position, 57 children had been released by hijackers due to brave act of Major General Naserullah Babar SJ and Bar, then interior minister. Hijackers now had taken 16 children into Afghan Embassy compound and holed themselves in one of the building. Their demands were 50 million US \$ in cash, a helicopter to fly them to Afghanistan and 200 trucks load of food for Afghanistan.

Zarrar Company after assessing the situation realised that the hijackers are quite relaxed and casual in approach, they demanded television and video cassette recorder alongwith films for children. Zarrar was able to gain further insight by posing as the electrician to fit in the television and other equipment. The negotiations with the hijackers continued all night, with hopes of a

settlement, negotiators were able to gain valuable time during which the Zarrar made its plan of raiding inside. Two teams were formed, initial plan was to induce sleeping pills in the hijackers tea but it was overruled. At night at 2230 hours , initial breach was made and with it the hijacker standing close to the children was shot down, and simultaneously the other team assaulted the main room in which other hijackers were taking rest, they shot back but were soon shot by the Zarrar Company . The whole episode thus ended without any fatal casualty to own troops.

## Operation Sun Rise - July 2007

In 2007, the militancy which had initiated from the tribal areas in 2003 and later expanded into the Swat state, also reached the capital Islamabad. In the capital city, the Lal Mosque alongwith its complex for female students Jamia Hafsa became a hub of anti-state activities. The religious militants were infact testing the patience of the state on daily basis. The veiled female students armed with sticks started acting as the moral brigade of the militants; imposing their own brand of morality. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2007, the situation reached a point where the militants snatched rifles from the policemen

on duty, apart from setting ablaze few government buildings.

Government from mid-June 2007 was anticipating such crises, the elite Zarrar Company which was raised for such very issue of hostage rescue was given the warning order. The Zarrar was being commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Haroon Islam. The very core of Zarrar training is to use minimum level of violence and firepower in any rescue operation, they thus rely more upon the sniper action. The Lal Mosque operation is the very first operation in Pakistan which was being televised live by every channel, thus putting extra pressure on the government to have negotiations with the militants; it was a kind of religious blackmailing by the media.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2007, advance elements of Zarrar were in position in an isolated forest east of Islamabad sports complex, also a company of 1 Commando Battalion undercommand Major Jawwad was in position , occupying the Federal Government school building in close vicinity . An operational command centre was established at the Army Public School at Westridge { schools were closed for summer vacations}. The negotiations with the militant leader Abdul ghazi who was also the Imam of the mosque continued, government was sincere in these talks and wanted to avoid any

bloodshed, on the other hand government was also ready and planning to act in case the talks fails.

Zarrar Company in the period carryout reconnaissance of the mosque and complex, officers and men also offered prayers inside the mosque in disguise to have an inner look at the structure, layout and general pattern of working. The Zarrar also carried out an indepth reconnaissance of the outer perimeter of the complex in the disguise of sanitary workers wearing yellow uniform. On 4<sup>th</sup> July 2007, initial plan was hatched, which revolved around having own snipers on the adjoining high buildings, with an aim to take down the militants who were armed and performing the sentry duties. Intelligence agencies have reported over 600 male, 1500 female students and presence of 150 foreigner militants armed with explosives and small arms. The general impression which these militants gave was as if all the students are residing at their own will, however, it was not true, majority wanted to leave the complex but they were not allowed to do so by the militants thus keeping them as hostage and human shield.

Zarrar company , planned to make breaches in the southern and eastern walls of the complex to allow the hostages to escape, it was on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2007, when the tenth breach was being made, that militants from the roof top took the life of Lieutenant Colonel Haroon Islam ;

his martyrdom was the turning point of the operation, government decided to carry on the operation.

### **Operation Starts**

On 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007, at 0300 hours the Zarrar assault teams were in position, time for operation was set at 0345 hours, it was put to hold at last minute as negotiations were still underway, however at 0358 hours the go ahead for operation was given and assault started. As a deception, the armoured personal carriers {APC} rolled onto the complex from eastern side where as the assault teams entered into the complex from northern side.

There were two main assault groups having sub-teams, first group led by Major Wajahat was tasked to conduct hostage rescue and search in Lal masjid compound, male students and staff accommodation, furthermore they had to block any entry from north. After making an entry undercommand Naib Subedar Ahmed Yar the assault teams under command Captain Salman and Captain Ahteram move forward and cleared the main mosque hall, in the adjoining rooms there were twelve hostages , who started running out, Captain Salman immediately ceased fire to give safe passage to these hostages. A militant hiding in the room fired and his bullets took the lives of Captain Salman and Sepoy Khalid, six more members of assault team received

injuries . Captain Ahteram and his team also suffered casualties while clearing the adjoining rooms, Sepoy Afsar Sayab embraced martyrdom . Despite all this, Zarrar Company was able to clear the main hall of mosque by 0900 hours.

Captain Tanveer and his team had the responsibility of clearing the ablution rooms and basement, they were able to rescue twenty hostages, similar to incident in the main hall, here too, the Zarrar gave a pause in firing to allow the hostages to escape, during which Captain Tanveer also received bullet injuries. By 1800 hours the main mosque complex was cleared.

Major Tauqir and his men had the mission to search and clear the Jamia Hafsa complex, they made entry through the southern portion. Naib Subedar Ali was the first one to dash upstairs and secured the roof top. Major Tauqir led his men to the adjoining building, the team came under fire from militants, three members of the team got injured. The follow up assault teams were attacked by militants who threw hand grenades on them , resultantly ten soldiers were injured, Havildar Muhammad Khan and Naik Muhammad Siddique embraced shahadat.

Another assault team undercommand Major Tahir, detoured from west and reached the roof top.



Captain Afzal and his team also managed to join Major Tauqir at the rooftop. This assault group now started clearing the complex from top to bottom. They did not meet any resistance, till they reached the basement, time was 1600 hours. There was a suspense among the assault teams as whether there are any militants inside the basement or not. Major Tauqir took no risk, he made holes in the roof of the basement, gave warning to the militants for surrender or they will be all shot; still no answer from the basement. Major Tauqir as a last resort, went downstairs and to his amazement, there was none in the basement.

As the team was moving upstairs and towards the hall, fire came from one corner, a militant was able to sneak out and he had opened fire upon the assault team. Major Tauqir and Naik Rab Nawaz were injured and Lance Naik Sheraz embraced shahadat . Major Tahir now took over the command of assault team, they fired upon the room from where fire had been inflicting casualties on own soldiers. A grenade was thrown in the room and then a volley of fire before an entry was made in it; there was none in the room except the dead body of Abdul Rashid Ghazi, he was the one who had fired upon the assault teams and resultantly took the lives of two soldiers; time was 1800 hours.

The third assault group had the task of hostage rescue operation in the northern portion of Jamia Hafsa

complex, undercommand Major Adil. This group also had made entry into the complex at 0410 hours, with the help of a rocket launcher. Staircases were secured by Naib Subedar Saleem and Naib Subedar Inayat, after securing staircases the clearance of room started. Minutes later, Subedar Inayat who was clearing the first floor was hit with militant bullets, he embraced shahadat while being evacuated to the hospital, Sepoy Naseer who also got the burst of bullet was fortunate to survive.

Sepoy Naseer was lying critically injured few meters away from the room, Captain Bilal and Sepoy Waheed Afzal simply dashed amidst the militant firing and were able to retrieve sepoy Naseer to safety. Later the assault team fired rocket into the room, lobbed grenades , thus forcing two militants to come out of the room, two militants were already killed inside the room due to earlier firing of rocket. Safety of hostages was paramount, otherwise killing all the militants was not a serious issue, resultantly at 1045 hours, twenty seven ladies who were being held hostage by the militants were able to come out of a room.

## **Epilogue**

The complete complex was searched for improved explosive devices {IED} and was handed over to the army on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2007 at 1300 hours.

468 women and children, and 690 men were freed from the militants in day long operation, Ten commandos embraced shahadat while eleven received serious injuries and 31 had minor injuries. Among the militants , 91 were killed and 193 were injured and taken as prisoners.

More than anything else, the operation restored the writ of government, raised the morale of population and gave a precise and clear message to the militants , that where ever they are, SSG and army will hunt them.

### **General Headquarters Rescue Operation**

On the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> October 2009 at 1000 hours a white high roof van stopped in front of GHQ Gate No.1, there were nine men sitting wearing army uniform and looked like army soldiers from their haircut. The security persons, at GHQ are civilians and mostly retired army soldiers; there was a backup of an infantry company as well. The men simply got out and started firing indiscriminately all around. The security responded with retaliation fire in which four miscreants died on the spot. Rest of the attacking group rushed in the GHQ and occupied the nearest building which happened to be that of Military Intelligence. A

conference was underway, Brigadier Anwar and Lieutenant Colonel Waseem came out to inquire about the noises, they were shot dead by the miscreants. The surviving five miscreants now turned the building into a stronghold, a serious crisis have taken birth.

Zarrar was informed about the impending situation, within an hour the Zarrar was landing in the under construction Military Hospital ground; they came in two teams undercommand Lieutenant Colonel Rizwan Lashari. ‘ after landing, my teams as per the training and procedures took up their positions, we were taken on vehicles into GHQ, where army chief was also present, I was informed about the situation, in return I assured everyone that Zarrar will live upto the reputation. The immediate Action {IA} teams under Major Shoaib Butt, Captain Amir Shahzad, Captain Wasim Barkatullah and the sniper team under Captain Hasan Zia took position, apart from these officers there wee 40 Zarrar soldiers. ‘. In the follow up a company of 4 Commando also reached the GHQ.

The mastermind and leader of the militant gang was Aqeel alias Doctor Usman, he had enrolled in army medical corps in 2003 and deserted it in 2005, the demands of the militants included release of 113 high level miscreants, safe passage to south Waziristan Agency on helicopter, later the militants added the

demand for food and live media coverage. There were 43 hostages with the militants.

Negotiators were able to prolong the negotiations, gained valuable time in which Zarrar was able to plan. It was thought and worked as well, to incapacitate the militants through the gas by using the internal air-conditioning system, a civilian engineer was also called but the plan did not worked as desire thus it was left. Meanwhile deliberate action team also took positions. Militants had given the deadline of 0200 which the negotiators were able to extend it till first light. In the meanwhile few hostages were able to escape, they were hiding in different floor of the building thus they were able to get away.

At 0530 hours, the assault teams move forward, however this move was detected by one miscreant who fired on the advancing soldier, resultantly injured him, in this chaos, the other teams initiated the assault. The hostages sensing the situation started running out, one of the miscreant fired a burst of bullets which killed two civilian officials and an army major, the miscreant himself was shot, he later blew himself up. In the meanwhile three more miscreants who tried to shot the running hostages, these all miscreants were shot by the snipers, one of the miscreant also blew himself . Now there was only one miscreant, who was hiding

somewhere in the building; he was the leader of the pack Doctor Usman.

During breaching of the building to find Doctor Usman, the roof collapsed, thus all nine members of the assault team came under the debris, resultantly four soldiers embraced shahadat. In this cloud of debris, the nine hostages came out, one of them thanking the God and the army for saving his life; he was moving away, when one of the hostage shouted ‘ he is Doctor Usman, do not let him go’. Thus the ring leader of the attack on GHQ was apprehended and handed over to the intelligence agencies.

## Army Public School – Peshawar

There are events which are so tragic that words cannot explain them, they can only be felt ; 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014 was one such day. Over 500 hundred students ranging from Class I –X, had gone to school, with an anticipation of having a day full of activities and fun. First Aid Class was in progress when at 1013 hours all of a sudden the bursts of fire shattered the peace and dreams of these young kids. Half a dosen militants had scaled the southern wall of the school, entered into auditorium and indiscriminately started killing students, first to bear the brunt were students of Class 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> who were having the First Aid lecture. Militants in the

meantime also rushed to the classrooms where they segregated the children of army personals, the innocent children not knowing what is in their fate simply raised their hands to acknowledge their father is in army, were taken out and simply shot dead. There was a chaotic situation, children running around, shouts of firing, pleas for mercy from children, weeping, sobbing it was a living hell.

After the initial shock, troops of 102 Brigade, Elite Police and Frontier Corps troops reached the school site. Lieutenant colonel Amjad the commanding officer of 7 commando Battalion narrates ‘ I was in Rawalpindi, standing outside the gate of GHQ in connection with a conference when I received a call on my mobile from the headquarters, informing me about some incident at army school in Peshawar, I immediately rang my second in command and ordered him to take the company. Meanwhile I turned back and within an hour I was at the toll plaza, there was a long queue of vehicles, I informed a policeman about the intended task and ask for a help to clear the area , he showed his inability. Luckily , I found a rickshaw who agreed to take me to the school area through a route which only he knew. I alongwith my runner, than sat in rickshaw and amazingly in twenty minutes through a labyrinth of narrow streets he dropped us close to the site, my troops were there and I took control of situation.

By 1120 hours, the company of 7 Commando Battalion was inside the school compound, where already Inspector General Frontier Corps {IGFC} and few officers were present, including Brigadier Tariq Saeed, his wife a teacher was inside the compound. At 1105 hours the warning order was received by the Zarrar Company and within 45 minutes the company was airborne, they were taken in two sorties of Mi-17 helicopters, {four helicopters I first wave and one helicopter in second sortie, and three helicopters in third sortie}. Zarrar landed at Peshawar sports stadium at 1253 hours. General Officer Commanding SSG Major General Abid Rafique also reached the site.

It was a highly sensitive operation, lives of children were at stake and militants had all the intention of killing all of the hostages, At 1345 hours after taking into account all possibilities, GOC SSG gave the go ahead for a 'hasty clearance'. Snipers were already placed in position. The teams of Zarrar after entering the school compound started moving forward, fire was coming from multiple direction. The militants had now taken the hostages into the administration block, from where they were not only firing upon the own troops but also throwing grenades. At 1512 hours, one of the militant just came out of the room and blasted himself, the splinters caused injuries to own troops. Thus the situation was precarious, any further delay and militants



would have blown all the hostages . Another militant in similar fashion blew himself up at 1538 hours. Meanwhile Zarrar teams were able to extricate the three teachers and two children who were hiding in washroom, through the ventilator. A militant was shot dead while he was crossing the corridor, he immediately exploded. As the Zarrar closed in the militants started exploding themselves. Timely and gallant action of Zarrar saved further seven female and five male teachers.

By 1712 hours , the militants were killed and compound was cleared. All in all, nine male staff, seven female staff and seven school children were rescued. Four officers and six soldiers were injured in the action.

## Chapter VII

### **Special Operations School**

The Commando course of SSG is the most difficult course in the Pakistan Army for the reason that

the ratio of passing the course vis a vis intake is the lowest as compare to other army courses; this ratio is almost identical with the passing out ratio of fighter pilots in PAF. The myths, legends and stories associated with the commando course by itself can fill up volumes. Over period of time it has undergone few changes but by and large the core has remained the same as when the very first course was initiated in September 1957. Major General Faisal Alvi in 1999 as the commander of SSG while giving the opening and welcome address to the new intake started his address with the remarks ‘gentlemen remember Geneva Convention ends at Chapri’. The other very common statement given is ‘you have to snatch this wing from us, we will try our best to deprive you of this’. The end statement is that SSG training staff try their utmost to break an officer and only then the best among the best are able to put on this wing on their chest

The very first advance commando course was run between September 1957-February 1958 at Cherat ; it was mainly organised and instructed by the American team headed by Colonel Bunte. Sixteen officers were able to pass through the gruelling course including Captain Aslam Beg {he became Pakistan Army chief in 1988-1991}. The pattern of officers induction at that time was that initially the volunteer officers would spend three months with the SSG during which they underwent

training and at the end were put through a final test before formal induction in SSG. The officers of First Advance Commando Course followed this pattern too, however , at the end of three month course they were further put through this six month course.

In January 1958, while the first course was under progress it was decided to induct more officers and other ranks, trained them together and after successful completion of the course, additional companies{G, H, J, K, L} will be raised around this nucleus. This was a classic pattern , as the officers and men were trained together and later served together as well.

The induction system of soldiers and other ranks varied with time. In 1959, it was experimented to have recruits selected from centres into SSG and trained them at Cherat. The main advantage lied in having the right mind set from onset; it was and still is the mind set of soldier and officer in SSG which really differentiate them from conventional and traditional mind-set and attitude of regular troops. These fresh recruits were palced as F Company and after completion of training were posted to other companies as well; it was discontinued in 1964.

On 4<sup>th</sup> March 1968 , Serial No.10 Officers Advance Commando Course started with an intake of 21 officers including four officers from Pakistan Air Force,

it commenced on 3<sup>rd</sup> August , with only 15 officers qualifying {including two from PAF}; six officers were dropped from the course. In the next course out of 22 officers {including 4 from PAF} only 16 managed to qualify. In the Serial No.12 Course, which started on 9<sup>th</sup> march 1970, there were 39 officers including seven officers from PAF, no less that 14 officers were dropped and for the first time a precedence was set where three officers despite qualifying the course were dropped hours before the graduation parade on grounds of discipline. This sent a very strong signal and message among all the aspirants of joining the SSG that , it is a highly disciplined organisation where no slackness on discipline is tolerable.

Till 1965, all volunteers {less officers} had certain age and service limit, a junior commissioned officer had maximum age limit of 38 years, a havildar not more than 33 years , similarly naik to be under 30 years and a sepoy should not be more than 27 years of age. In addition , all must have initiative, emotionally stable and their service record be clear of any red ink entry ; at least for last two years. Educational standards were not very high at that time in the country and in army, yet these volunteers for SSG were required to be able to read and write, only a JCO was required to be able to read English. The intake for Other Ranks varied, in 1968 it was in excess of 400 out of which only 182

qualified{ 273 soldiers were dropped out of an intake of 455}. Almost identical pattern of having 50 % soldiers being able to qualify the commando course has remained in vogue even at present. For soldiers during the course , separate companies were raised { Haider, Sadiq, Nazir, Abbass, Javed, Mehdi and Riaz} these companies were only meant for the duration of the course.

In 1967-68, the oath ceremony or Pledge of Commando was made mandatory for all passing out commandos {both officers and other ranks }

### **Officers Commando Course.**

SSG is the first arm and corps which captures the imagination of gentlemen cadets in Pakistan Military Academy, the insignia of SSG is drawn on almost every satchel of every cadet and cadets do dream of joining it after passing out. The adventure parachute training and subsequent familiarisation visits of cadets to different corps and formations further add fuel to the burning desires of these would be officers of army. Naturally every cadet does not get the regiment of his choice but there is always a way out for them, join the SSG and fulfil your dreams. Within army, regiments are by and large not willing to depart from their young officers thus many officers have to resort to ‘direct method’ for being at least given a chance to appear for the SSG tests. The

‘Direct Method’ remained in vogue till 2000, under this any officer could write a demi official to the commander SSG requesting him to send a signal to his unit where by authorising the intended officer to be spared for the tests. Captain Salik Nawaz Cheema , SJ , Shaheed , is one such example, he was a brilliant officer and his regiment { 127 MAA } was reluctant in allowing him to appear for the tests, Captain Salik wrote a letter to Brigadier Tariq Mahmood and a week later he got the signal to appear in the tests at Attock.

*It was Muhararm, there was no transport from Sargodha, I thus travelled on roof of the public bus from Sargodha to Attock at night and got down at Attock Fort. From gate till mess , I walked singing and joking. At Mess there were small tents pitched for us, there were around thirty odd junior officers who had come for the test, all in all over three hundred applies for SSG. The initial tests were tough, running and a long route march which was dubbed as after dinner walk but lasted till wee hours of morning. The repelling and the most notorious; the test around the pool or the Tunnel Test. It is this test which breaks the will of majority of officers who have lasted till here. The test is , that you are given a task to steal something from the end of tunnel and you are caught by enemy and then how you reacts and survives because enemy tortures you. Thus the feeling of darkness in a tunnel of five hundred years old fort, and*

*all of a sudden an unexpected kick or a punch and then you are captured and interrogated which naturally includes torture in form of beating; very few officers can bear this. An officer at any time can simply say 'non volounteer' and torture ends instantly, thus it is a test of mental endurance. Finally an interview with the Brigadier Tariq Mahmood{TM} and other officers to have a final assessment of you. The question in board are not regular kind of questions but rather 'what was the most embarrassing moment of your life ' types and in the end you are told about the result;. One of the commando Sepoy Zulfiqar in Attock was from my regiment, I was not knowing it but he send me grapes as a gift.*

Captain Salik Nawaz Cheema not only became a commando , but he was decorated with Sitara-i-Jurat in Siachen ; posthumously.

Lieutenant Attaullah joined SSG in 2006, ‘ *I was commissioned in Ordnance Corps, I had a desire to join SSG, however in 2005 under revised organisation of Ordnance, the officers were not allowed to join SSG. One day , in the evening, I was so dishearten while sitting in the lawn of the armoured division mess at Kharian that one field officer out of curiosity inquired, 'young man what makes you look so gloomy'. I narrated my ordeal that , I have explored all avenues but still I am not finding a way to join SSG. The major himself a SSG*

*officer smiled and narrated that how he too had faced similar situation and approached the President General Zia during his visit to the armoured formation and requested him to be given a chance; General Zia accepted his requests. I got a clue and same evening I made a call to the Army House in Rawalpindi; operator attended the call, for next week I made at least a dozen call everyday to the Army House telling them the purpose of my calls. Finally the Army Chief and President General Pervaiz Musharraf returned my call, but unfortunately I was out of office, thus my commanding officer attended the call, however the operator highlighted that President wants to talk to Lieutenant Attaullah only. When I came back to the office, everybody was giving me strange looks, my commanding officer inquired as why the call came from army house, I explained the reason and my commanding officer just stared at me in disbelief. Later I rang the army house and I was told to write a demi official letter, after a day I received a signal , directing me to report at Special Operations school at Cherat for the course'. Lieutenant Attaullah not only successfully passed the course but later on performed exceptionally well in Baluchistan operations, he was wounded in the operations. He received a demi official letter from the General Musharraf after he successfully completed the course; General Musharraf was keeping a track of Lieutenant Attaullah.*



President General Pervez Musharraf himself had joined SSG in 1966, and he wrote. *'The training was physically exacting, there was very tough physical exercise for an hour every day, starting with a warm up run of two miles, we ran four miles with weapon once a week, twelve miles with weapons in two hours; thirty six miles with weapon and thirty-pound pack in ten hours. In addition there tactical exercises involving hundreds of miles of route marches. Then there was watermanship in lakes and fast flowing canals, as well as parachute training in which one had to qualify in six jumps. Eating delicacies like snakes, frogs' legs and local lizards is not infrequent. I learned that one can eat anything except plants with white sap. One test was to hold a self made grenade of plastic explosives with holes made at three-second intervals in the time fuse. A new SSG volunteer was expected to throw the bomb when the spark of the ignited time fuse came out of the last hole just three seconds before exploding. Another test was to run on a yard wide iron beam 300 feet high, spanning the top of the side structure of a metal bridge about 150 yards in length. The distance had to be covered in forty seconds. Another improvised test was to lie flat on one's stomach in a railway culvert, looking toward a train hurling at full speed that would pass one or two feet away; closing the eyes was not allowed'*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Pervez Musharraf *In The Line of Fire A Memoir* {Simon &

Brigadier late Z.A.Ahmed wrote in his autobiography *The Way It Was*.

*‘At the ‘H’ Company office Captain Manto, Guides Cavalry, 6<sup>th</sup> PMA Course, from the first parade to the game parade I was to move at the double when going from one place to another, that every morning there would be PT except on Saturday, that on Wednesday there would be five mile run with the ‘80’ pack, on Saturday there would be a fifteen miles routes march with full’ field service marching order’ and every evening, except Saturday there would be games, Captain Manto then me in his jeep a little distance on a track leading out of Cherat and indicated an area about three hundred feet below the road level and told me that it was my training area.*

*Next I was introduced to the platoon that I was to train and in the process, get my own training. The men were volunteers and had been selected from all over the army, the incentive were the monetary allowance, certain deviations from the time honored army routines and methods such as no roll calls. The men did not march in bodies to their place of duty and the most appreciated privilege was of being allowed to proceed on weekend leave by signing out and signing in on return. There were about forty men in the platoon, for*

*some reason there was no Junior Commissioned Officer or a havildar, the senior most NCO was Naik, I appointed him as the platoon havildar and my second in command, and appointed other NCOs, according to their seniority, in charge of sections. ‘*

The training started with basic fieldcraft training and night training stalking, this followed by patrolling, then selection and occupation or hideouts. Night training would start about eight o'clock at night, continue till about three o'clock in the morning and the next morning would be off till eleven.

*‘The Cherat hills were very steep, covered with wild olive bushes and were full of snakes, vipers around Cherat and Kraits in the foot hills. In one stalking exercise at night I was going down-hill, holding bushes and feeling for foot holds, and while I was hanging from a bushes snake went over my chest touching my neck and I could feel it passing over me.*

*In the selection and occupation of hideouts, I was told to move my platoon to within a given area and hide there for three days, cooking our own food and the ‘Demonstration Company’ who acted as the enemy in exercises, would search for us. If an officer got caught by the enemy he had to pay a fine to the ‘Demo Company’ men a chit was signed and handed over to whoever was the commander and the amount was*

*charged in the mess bill, besides this the ‘ Demo Company’ men would dance a bhangra around the officer. We moved out of Cherat in the evening with all the things that we thought would be necessary, early in the morning we stopped in an considered safe, when the sun camp up we found that the area was open and we could be seen from miles around and decided to have our morning meal and move out, Captain Jaffar Shah, Corps of Engineers, later lieutenant Colonel, was my umpire, we were sitting side by side when a small little krait snake came and started striking at Jaffer shah’s boot toe. I noticed it first and was watching it repeatedly striking the toe of Jaffer Shah’s boot when Jaffer Shah noticed me starting at his boot, he looked down, saw the snake about to strike him and made the most spectacular jump backward from a setting position. On this exercise the Demo Company found our hide-out but they did not find me. I hid a nullah bed when the attack alarm went. In the next exercise of this kind that we went out, we shed a lot of things that we had taken on the first outing, each individual worked out what his necessities were on an exercise and made his own arrangements. Weapons, communication equipment etc had to be carried according to the assigned mission.*

*As the training progressed, the number of men decreased every week, most of them quitting because they found that they did not have the physical endurance*

*required. When I started the training, I did not own a pair of army boots because in the Armoured Corps we mostly wore rubber-soled shoes. I had not been on a route march after leaving the PMA, on the first route march I wore a pair of half Wellingtons and my feet blistered, I then brought a pair of army boots. Broke them in and got used to wearing army boots again. ''*

When they had completed three months training, all platoons were given a test exercise, Captain Zaheer was given the demolition of a bridge located on the Grand Trunk Road near the Kamra airfield. He was called from the game parade in the evening and given the mission, the only information given was that the bridge over the Indus was guarded. *I assembled my platoon, briefed them and we moved out after having the evening meal, after marching all night we stopped about five miles from the Attock road cum rail bridge. I sent scouts to check how the bridge was guarded and to explore the availability of boats. My scouts returned and reported that all trucks were being stopped and searched and that the river was in high floods with no boats available. Since no vehicular traffic was permitted floods with no over the Attock bridge, my only alternative was the railway. We moved to the Khairabad railways station and waited for a train to stop, late at night a goods train stopped, I went to the locomotive and talked the driver into stopping at the Attock station across the bridge, this way*

*we the Indus. 'E' Company located at Attock Fort, was to act as our enemy and Captain Mirza Aslam Beg, later general and Chief of Army Staff, was to act our umpire, After the umpire Joined us and we had given map reference of our out a reconnaissance of the bridge, and we attacked. The attack was deemed successful and I was ordered by Lieutenant Colonel Mitha to report back at Cherat. We were not stopped to move during the day but calculating summed I marched the platoon towards Cherat hoping to reach the foothills on Cherat in daylight. On the way my platoon was ambushed, after we scattered the enemy started shouting and asking us to stop running. Cautiously we contacted the men who had ambushed us and found it was a platoon of '11' Company, also on a test exercise like us, and had ambushed us as joke, Captain Hamayun Malik , 6 Lancers, later brigadier, was the platoon commander and he remained me innumerable time about this ambush. After the ambush both the platoons marched together, all night we could see the red light over the PAF radio antenna in Cherat, all night it seemed around the next bend but we only reached it when dawn was breaking.''*

## **Cherat**

The course reports at Cherat, they are taken by a truck from Pabbi, any officer reporting late has to make his own arrangements to reach Cherat. Presently Cherat has undergone a major transition since 2000 with new mess building, spacious and modern rooms, stable supply of electricity and above all reasonable availability of water. Between 1958-1998, it seems as if time had stopped at Cherat. Pabbi is the first check post, almost five miles short of main check post, for all commando officers, it holds a very special place, as during the commando course , it is the most common form of punishment' go touch the Pabbi'. Thus an officer had to march down from Mess to Pabbi at night through the trek, sign the register at Pabbi and march back; it takes almost two hours for a return journey.

In the first four weeks, the officers are physical toned up with intensive running with military boots all around the hills. A morning physical training period, then time for breakfast , classes at Range, another class on demolition , a period on tactics; they are designed in a manner that students have to run from one end of the ridge to the other. Walking is not allowed only running, officers are paired ' buddy' , this is the strongest bond which an officer develops with another, if one officer is given a Chappri, than other officer irrespective of the fact that he was not guilty of any breach has to march with his buddy to Chappri. The course usually starts with

an intake of thirty odd students and slowly but gradually the officers start dropping out, some on loosing heart , few on medical grounds thus in the end only a handful {approximately 48%} are able to proudly puts on the SSG Wing . From Cherat the course moves to Mangla for watermanship training, they practically remains in water for days; it is a nightmare for non swimmers but at the end of four weeks all are good swimmers who can remain in water for hours, can swim two kilometres in running water. Late Lieutenant Colonel Mohabbat Khan Afridi was a non swimmer and it was only during the SSG course that he learnt, he was given so much tough time at Mangla Dam that he later remarked ‘ I now cannot even withstand a sight of a glass of water’.

The next phase of the course involves Desert Warfare, for which the students are taken to Desert Warfare School at Chorr . The area is full of snakes of all kind majority of whom are venomous. I had a snake phobia before I joined SSG, I could not even think of walking through the same track on which a snake had been sited a year ago, but during the course I slept in bushes where snakes were killed just now, such is the confidence which this course gave me. Lieutenant Colonel Niazi { Golden Dagger honour list} developed an interests in the snakes during the course to an extent that he later had a cobra kept as a pet , Niazi is taken as an expert on the snakes. At Chor , the snake charmers



have their own colony, SSG students are taken there and the snake charmers are also invited as guest speakers and to give demonstration. There is no truth in ‘singhi’ a herb which traditionally is taken as an antidote for snake bite, confirms Lt Colonel Niazi; he recalls how at one time at Choor during the demonstration the snake charmer was bitten by the snake and the snake charmer pleaded to be taken to the military hospital ‘ saein take me to the hospital, I do not believe on these singhis ‘. Students are given a simple deal by their instructors, ; catch a snake and your evening march will be reduced to half”, thus students are eager to catch a snake.

Mountain and snow warfare art are taught at Rattu, Kalam and adjoining mountainous areas, aim is to harden the art of fighting in such hilly terrain. At Peshawar or in Rawalpindi the choice is with the in charge training team , a training in intelligence fieldcraft is given, officers are given lectures than they have to practically demonstrate the art. They are often guise as low, medium and high agents, task with , to steal files and documents from regular army regiments. Major Jawwad narrates ‘ *In 2006, during training we were given the task of operating in guise in Peshawar city, I was was to pretend as a ‘maltia or masseur’ in the Saddar; I would walk with bottles of oil in my hand , and giving massage to public on payment, at times I had to pretend as a poor man seeking temporary jobs as waiter*

*in small hotels, as rickshaw drivers. In one of the exercise at Attock, I was task to get a file from artillery centre, I went to a mobile phone outlet and bought couple of sims, brochures and by luring the sales representative that my entire family is interested in getting the package, I got his visiting card. I later in a computer shop, did photo work on the card and pasted my picture. I was not ask to prove my national identity card at the artillery centre reception, I acted as a 'mummy daddy boy'. I managed to reach adjutant office, It was quite funny to act as a absolute stupid in front of the adjutant....later I managed to sit in the head clerk's office where I ask more innocent looking questions, after a brief time, I ask for glass of water and while drinking, I deliberately spill the water on files, as the clerical staff rushed to find the cloth to wipe. I slipped two odd files, thanked the clerks and walked out, took the rickshaw and managed to come out of artillery centre with desired files.'*

The survival exercise is off three days duration in the course in which the officers are tied and blindfolded and then just thrown away on grass in summer, later in the night they are put into a room full of mosquitoes and beaten too. Captain Hussnain narrated how he seriously thought of filtering the urine , in order to drink it, he narrated how his NCB once walked close by after washing clothes in the river and Hussnain just suck his

NCBs wet trouser in order to squeeze few drops of water. *In the course were two Africans, one from Azerbaijan, two from Sri Lanka and two Palestinians as well. Each nationality have different characteristics. Sri Lankan would remain quiet during beating so were the Africans and Palestinians, on the other hand during water torture the Pakistanis were comfortable but all other were shrieking. Water torture is one in which a towel is wrapped closely around a mouth of person, one of the training staff would sit on the chest and other staff would hurl the water to the tortured person , this water thus goes straight to the mouth during breathing and thus causes immense pain. At the end of this ordeal the dried blood of goat and raw blood of pigeon is given to the tortured officers.*

There are two main marches in the course, the 200 kilometres endurance march which usually starts from Mangla and terminates at Abbottabad, time allowed is five days, it is carried out with full marching load, and dry ration is given which the officer has to cook himself. Lieutenant Colonel 'Daato' narrates 'on the very first day, I had a nail in my boots, for next five days I limped and limped, I was the last one to complete the march'. The other is 80 Kilometres march with a time limit of 12 hours. The weight carried is approximately 12 pounds.

At the last leg of the course, the student officers and the training soldiers are trained together for a week

and then they are formed into small tactical groups and a final test exercise is conducted which involves a complete battle life cycle.

Soldiers course is known as the Soldiers Basic Commando Course, intake is over 500 in each batch , with only one-fifth passing out successfully. Sepoy Yasir {No.2421109} was recruited in 15 Punjab Regiment, he was serving at Leepa when the SSG enrolment team visited the regiment. *‘ I volunteered for the SSG alongwith one more soldier of my unit, we filled few forms and after a week got the letter to report at Pabbi. We were also instructed to bring three pair of uniforms, track suit and bedding. It was evening of 9<sup>th</sup> September 2010 when we both reported at Pabbi, full of enthusiasm and zeal. We were taken in army trucks to the Jallozai Camp, it was raining, all in all there were 800 soldiers who were part of the course. Soldiers kept coming in batches, however on very first evening, we fill the forms and it was midnight before we had a chance to put our kit in the bivouacs. Next morning, we were ‘ Fall In’ at five in morning and for next four weeks it was just pure physical exertion. My unit sepoy and many other had raised their hands in first twenty four hours , showing their inability to cope up with rigorous training, however for another week they were given even more tough routine before they were allowed to return back to unit. We were organised into three platoons, there was only*

*one company which was known as Najam Shaheed Company. Captain Furqan was our training officer, alongwith Naib Subedar Gulzar, Havildar Saeed, Havildar Naeem, Naik Asad, Naik Zafar and Lance Naik Faizullah were our training staff. By the end of first two weeks our strength was half and after four weeks we were quarter of original strength .At Jallozai apart from physical exertion we were taught combat medical and signal procedures. Every night there was punishment of a route march with weight. We then move to Dakhnair to have two weeks training in navigation. In this leg, we were taught map reading, navigating on compass, we would be given a grid reference and had to reach the objective on map and compass bearing at night. Next segment was learning the small arms, light machine gun, mortar and rocket launcher firing at Attock. In my regiment we had the Rifle G-3, but here I learnt Chinese sub machine gun stripping and assembling and firing. I had never fired a rocket launcher before, now I was taught and made to fire three rockets, I missed the first one but next two I hit it on target. Same was the case with mortar learning and firing, despite the physical exertion not only myself but all the soldiers were enjoying the course and the freedom of action which the SSG was inculcating in ourselves. Our bearing and confidence grew with each day, we would laugh, we would joke, sing song, poetry and narrates tales . Next we were taken to Mangla for swimming and waterman*

*ship training. I was a non swimmer , so was half the course, in these three weeks , we were not only taught swimming but we had to pass one mile swimming in costume, 500 meters swimming in uniform with army boots and 25 meters of swimming in lake with our weapon. It speaks volumes for the training itself that they made dead swimmers like me a proficient swimmer. During swimming we also had to jump from forty feet into water , it was to check our height phobia.*

*From Mangla, we had to march with our military kit to Abbottabad, covering a distance of 250 Kilometres in a five days, our route was Mangla-Gujar Khan-Kahutta- New Murree-Nathiagali-Abbottabad. March was carried out during hours of darkness, we were issued with flour, ghee, sugar, milk powder, pulses, salt and pepper. We were issued with utensils also and we had to cook the food ourselves, I had never cooked before in my life but I learnt cooking in these five days. It was winter, cold and it rained almost daily. My shoes were wet and later they become stiff, I had three pairs of socks as well but invariably we all had blisters on very first day. It was a tough march, at the end we all had cramps and stiff legs, we were given one week midterm break. The one unforgettable lesson which I and everyone else learnt was the importance of a good shoe , proper fitting and adjustment of the web equipment.*

*After midterm we reported back to Cherat, where we spent two weeks learning explosives and demolition techniques. We were issued with PE-3A explosives for training , Apart from explosives, we carried out repelling for a week at Cherat, assault course was also conducted daily; passing marks were six minutes for completing the assault course. A week was spent in the survival techniques, not many among us had seen a snake so close in our life, now we had to catch them from the bushes and search them in the graveyard. As the course was progressing, we became physical fit, now we were enjoying the course. We also underwent physical tests at Cherat, although we were running every day and running four miles on every Wednesday yet the tests had to be passed before we proceed to our next leg of airborne training. In the tests, we were required to do forty push-ups in one minute, 40 sit-ups in one minute, minimum of eight chin-ups , squat thrust repetition of forty in two minutes, four mile under thirty minutes with thirty pounds of weight and finally twelve miles with weapon, weight and water bottle in two hours.*

*At Peshawar, in next leg, we spent four weeks to learn parachute jumping. In first three weeks we did airborne physical training and ground work, in last week we carried out five jumps from C-130 aircraft. I think among the hundred odd students, only ten have been inside the aircraft before and now we had to jump. The*

*feeling of fear, the sensation, thrill, joy of airborne is beyond words to explain. After our last jump, we had to march back to Cherat, covering a distance of 80 Kilometres in under twelve hours.*

*Last two weeks , we were now grouped into tactical teams, given a scenario, a grid reference and we had to plan and conduct ambush and raid, seize and hold the area, make hideouts, infiltrate and extricate from the given situation. We all soldiers were given appointments, making us platoon commanders, commanders of raid and ambush parties, I learnt how to plan and give orders, how to ensure the tactical discipline of force, the considerations in such actions, the safety of my undercommand. Above all now we fully understood the importance of officers, the pressure they had to undergo in making and carrying out such operations, how vital is discipline for any force to succeed in any operation. Last week we spent , rehearsing for our passing out, now staff was also bit cordial and share jokes with us but training officer was still as fearsome as on day one. When the SSG Wing was put on my chest, it was the happiest and most satisfying moment of my entire life; I could not believe that I have survived such gruelling months. I cannot forget the dedication with which our training team trained us, for me and for entire course they are the most reverend men’.*



## **Types and Variety of Courses**

In 1999, Special Operations Training School was raised at Cherat. It was a major step in bringing the training in light with the modern environment. Previously, a taring team was established for each course but now it has become institutionalised. Some of the traditional screening regimes like tests at Attock have been replaced with more modern methods like having a psychologist on the panel of selection board. The criteria of selection has also been upgraded, now any officer with a red ink entry or having low or average grades in military courses may consider himself extremely lucky to be given a chance in SSG. For a short period it was experimented in having officers directly posted or be given a chance to appear for tests straight from Pakistan Military Academy, also at times the restriction of having served in the regiment and undergone the basic courses have been waived but by and large , the induction and selection system at present is more scientific in nature.

SSG Advance Commando Course is the ultimate test of an officer and a soldier's mental and physical endurance, it makes a warrior out a gentleman, it brings those hidden qualities within an officer or a soldier , about which even the individual is not fully aware. Extensive firing and physical regimes thus inculcates basic killing instincts in the commando.

Under the present training regime, the courses have been classified as Induction, foundation, leadership, specialist and advance . In the induction courses, there are only two courses, one for officers which is known as Officers Advance Commando course having a duration of 33 weeks, at present three such courses are conducted every year. The soldiers induction course is a 28 weeks long and it is also conducted thrice a year. The prerequisites are having service not less than one year and not more than five years. A soldier must have a clean conduct sheet as well, must have passed the army standards of physical and range efficiency tests. For an officer criteria is almost identical with only one exception , he must have two years of service in regiment of his commission.

In the foundation phase which starts after the soldiers and officers have successfully completed the induction phase and are posted in the commando battalions.

There are eight courses which falls under the Foundation category, the first and foremost is the mixed martial arts course, it is twelve weeks long and the both soldiers and officers undergo together. Students are taught the unarmed combat skills; it is conducted indoor and outdoor. Small arms course, automatic weapons course, rocket launcher, mortar specialist, sniper, advance explosives and demolition, security and

unarmed combat and advance navigation courses all falls under the foundation stage; all these courses have duration of four weeks. These courses are mandatory and a soldier cannot be promoted to next rank unless he has undergone these courses. For the sniper course, the prerequisites are naturally to have a six-by-six eye sight, a natural instinct as a firer and a good and sound tactical knowledge.

Leadership courses are by and large more oriented for the soldiers, they are groomed, trained and taught to handle duties as platoon , team, and combat leaders. There are five courses under this category, duration varies from six weeks for primary junior leadership to twelve weeks for advance leadership and management course. These are again a prerequisite for soldier's especially non-commissioned officers for further promotion.

SSG Specialist Courses, all have a duration of twelve weeks with an exception of basic specialist operation communication course which have a duration of sixteen weeks, on the other hand the geographic information system and navigation course which is a six weeks duration course. In the specialisation course, the individual commando {soldiers and officers} are trained to be a specialist in any one field. Combat diving leads to the water and underwater arena, demolition and explosives is another field, so is advance sniper course.

The snipers are a modern reality and SSG pays extra attention to train its commandos in becoming excellent snipers, thus this advance sniper course of twelve weeks is an extension of basic sniper course which is six weeks duration. Combat Driving Course is the lengthiest in terms of duration, it is twenty two weeks long course in which commandos are trained as the name suggests in driving under combat environments. Specialist courses are also a mandatory phase for all commandos, but they are supposed to undertake only one course only.

The Advance Courses are more oriented towards the protection of high and important officials, there are three courses which includes close protection, special driving and communication course, duration vary from six to twelve weeks.

Apart from the abovementioned courses which are exclusively meant and designed for those soldiers and officers who are to be inducted or already inducted in SSG, there are three other courses which are conducted for all arms; they include officers, soldiers basic commando course and a counter terrorism course.

## Parachute Training School

Para Training School {PTS} was inaugurated on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1964 at Peshawar, the very first para jumps

in Pakistan were performed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1962 as part of Exercise Joint Train. Captain Humayun Malik, Captain Mohsin Khan and Captain Khalid Latif Ansari had the honour of making the first ever para jumps in Pakistan.

The establishment of Parachute School itself has a history. In 1962 after the exercise it was principally decided to establish a school in Pakistan, Americans agreed to provide the equipment to raise three Para Companies. Peshawar was a natural choice mainly as the PAF had its headquarters at Peshawar, thus land was purchased from Military dairy farm. Construction of 43 feet high para tower was an issue but it was resolved accidentally when Major Iqbal {G-2 Training} while roaming in Chaklala found the towers and wires imported for construction of a hanging bridge in Northern Areas. The Water and Power Authority {WAPDA} was very helpful in the initial gathering of towers and other material. An eleven member American team came to Pakistan; they initially ran a course meant to refresh the officers and soldiers who were trained in America and later to award instructor rating to selected SSG personals to impart further training in Pakistan. Rigger training was to be conducted simultaneously; Rigger is the one who packs the parachute.

At the inauguration ceremony, Major Khalid Latif Ansari a qualified rigger was appointed as the first

Commandant Parachute Training School. The very first package of parachute arrived in school on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1964 and first night tactical jumps were carried out on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1964. School celebrated its silver jubilee of conducting 25000 jumps during 26<sup>th</sup> Basic AirBorne course on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1969; Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Hayat made the silver jubilee jump. Another mile stone was blind jumps and at company level which were performed on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1969 and the first Free fall was made by major Tariq Mahmood on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1970 from a height of 6300 feet, Captain Akram, subedar Mohammad sheriff, Naib Subedar Yousef Hussain , havildar Mohammad Hussain and havildar Shoukat Islam were the other jumpers .

It was due to these successful para jumps that SSG was authorised to wear the Maroon Beret and keep a dagger; it was authorised in 1964.

The very first casualty was havildar Noor Islam who died while jumping in May 1964 and than the next accident took place on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1983 when Captain Tariq Mahmood lost his life followed by Captain Sarfraz Khan in June 1985. Commander SSG Brigadier Tariq Mahmood himself died while jumping on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1989, Captain Sher Rehman lost his life on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1992, two soldiers died on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1992, Sepoy Yousaf Khan and Sepoy Javed Iqbal. Havildar Liaqat Ali had an emergency on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1995 which proved fatal.

Flight Lieutenant Shahzad Awan's parachute failed to deploy on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1995 and last casualty was sepoy Muhammad Saleem on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1997.

Para Training School had completed 24,7,378 jumps by year 2004 and till to date has completed 32,9,543 jumps.

The parachute training for Pakistan military academy cadets was initiated in 1968, Brigadier A.O.Mitha was the commandant in military academy and it was his initiative which proved very useful in all these years. It was in 1968 that the Para jumps were first demonstrated at Defence of Pakistan day in Rawalpindi and since then it is the most looked forward act in the parade; traditionally it is always the commander SSG who performs the free fall jump with his team.

There is a difference between the Para Jumps conducted by the officers and soldiers as part of adventure training and SSG men as part of training. Although the standard of physical training is the same which is known as Air borne PT, however the in adventure training only three jumps are carried out where as in SSG training six jumps are mandatory. Among these six jumps, first two are simple, next two are performed with weapon and equipment and last two are at night with weapon and equipment.

Sepoy Awais of 7 Commando Battalion underwent basic commando course in 2012 successfully, he narrates ‘ *I enjoyed my first jump as I was unaware of what is going to happen , I jumped out from 1500 feet and after four seconds my parachute was deployed and I had a wonderful feeling of flying and floating, there is not much of control in the parachute , on landing I just made the fall with the direction of the wind. It took me a minute to land after the deployment of the parachute. Main thing to remember is to land with both feet, in case if a parajumper lands with one feet then he is most likely to get a twisted ankle or a fracture. In next jumps I was more conscious of what will happen on landing. During the jumps with tactical load, weapon is fastened around the body lest it falls away, the pack {rucksack} is tied with legs and is released fifty feet from ground. Immediately after landing the first thing to do is to release the parachute pack, then to assemble and collect it, more often it gets dirty and many bushes are attached with it. Night jump is more on experience, as I was inexperience thus I had a nasty fall, you cannot judge the height it is more of feeling. During one of the jump, my buddy had already deployed the parachute and I was overhead, but I just walk over the deployed parachute and was over in the air.*’

In May 2000, Major Haroon {later lieutenant colonel, shaheed , Hilal Shujaat} and Captain Adnan



Bashir had a nasty mid-air collision, in which their parachutes became entangled, canopies became partially collapse which increased the rate of descend, both despite all efforts failed to free themselves from each other. Both had a very hard landing, suffering from multiple rib and thigh fractures. Both remained hospitalised for well over two months; credit goes to army doctors and to the Army Medical Corps that not only both were back on active duty but later served the country and SSG.

In SSG as in other organisations which deals with flying, any accident results in extensive parachuting, aim is to highlight that it was an accident and nothing more than that ; commandant Para Training school is always the first one to jump after any such accident. On the other hand all accidents are probed deeply to find the cause and remedial actions are taken.

## Musa ‘M’ Company ‘Amphibious’

In 1945 the British Army had raised a River Reconnaissance Unit, the unit came as part of Pakistan Army share in independence and as such was stationed in East Pakistan. The terrain and geography of the East Pakistan was most suitable for its deployment and operations. In 1958 the M company was raised and Captain Mahmood Kamal ‘Kumbho’ was made its first officer commanding. Mahmood

was a qualified diver having attended the Frogman Course from America, moreover he belongs to East Pakistan, with him was Subedar Mannan who was also a Bengali. Captain Mahmood and later Captain Hakim Arshad Qureshi commanded the M Company. One detachment of the M was stationed at Karachi and other at Chittagong. M Company was changed into Musa Company in 1965, in the same year as Pakistan Navy had obtained its first submarine Ghazi from USA thus Musa Company was attached with the Pakistan Navy . The company was given the operational task of blowing few bridges in 1965 War but war itself ended before Musa Company could received its operational orders. In 1967, Musa Company was shifted from Karachi to Mangla and in 1982 to Tarbela for a short period before reverting back to its present location.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1969, the first ever parajumps into the Mangla Lake was carried out by Musa Company, eleven para troopers took part in that jump. Musa Company has also served in Sierra Leone in July 2001.

### **Training Allied Countries**

The very first foreign country to be trained was Bangladesh in 1976, five officers and soldiers were able to pass the gruelling course, so far 43 Bangladeshis officers and soldiers have been trained. All in all so far 3605 officers and soldiers have been trained by SSG from 31 different countries including Abu Dhabi, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Brunei, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Lebanon, Maldives,

Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Niger, Palestine, Qatar, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, United States of America, and Oman. The courses and art in which these countries have been trained ranges from personal protection, protection of installation to full-fledged commando course. Language is definitely an issue but it is overcome through an interpreter and above all after few weeks both the instructor and students do understand each other.

Lieutenant Colonel Zafar Niazi was the training officer in the SSG and back in 2003 conducted the commando course for the Saudi Arabian students. *‘There were over fifty students, two majors and remaining all soldiers, initially as usual the allied students try to take advantage of language barrier but soon after two weeks, we were having only forty students. Pattern and standards were as high as our own commando course. For them we made one change, instead of conducting the course in mountains we took them to desert after initial breaking period at Cherat. Some of them were good in running, and rest we made sure come up to our standards. I still remember that one student Abdul Saleh was a good runner, and during 12 miles test was leading the pack with long steps, I did cautioned him twice to keep in mind the distance and thus shorten his steps but he paid no heed, later he developed cramps and although he passed his test but he was fourteenth in number. He after the test came to see me with his officer, he was weeping and feeling sorry for not listening to the advice of ‘Muallam’. During the survival exercise which was conducted in Rahim Yar Khan desert, I took the course, blindfolded them and after five hours of*

*driving in the desert took them to the deserted fort of Bhagla, not very far from the town itself. They were given only a bottle of water each and had to survive for a week on it. One staff was with them all the time but he was on rotation. After three days, I visited them, they were expecting that maybe I have brought water with me but they were disappointed. There was a water cooler in the jeep, I in front of them threw the water in sand; they all cried in unison, 'major its kufr'. One of them took the distilled water bottle from the jeep and shared it with his comrades. Students whether they are local or foreigners have same mind set and habits, all are good actors. Thus this particular student now acted as if he is dying and all his fellow students were appealing to me in the name of humanity to take him and few others to nearest hospital; I paid no heed and told them to simply march to next hideout. The actor student after few steps simply fell on the ground and became motionless. We marched and after few minutes the almost dead student joined us, he came running. At the end of course they all were fighting fit, trimmed, proud, happy and very grateful. I feel proud, as two among them later qualified from USA as SEAL as well.*

SSG not only trains the foreign students but carryout mutual commandos exercise with few of the countries, most notable being China, USA, UK and Turkey. In September 2016, first ever joint training with Russian Special Forces was carried out. These mutual exercises are beneficial to both participants, as after decade long war on terror, SSG is regarded as the foremost expert in counter terrorism.

### **Training other Arms, Services and Departments**

SSG have been the main contributor in establishing the special branches in Pakistan Navy and Pakistan Air Force. Sailors and airmen have been getting training at Cherat since the very inception of the SSG. In almost every course there are vacancies for them, also SSG instructors are attached with these two services on regular basis. Similarly SSG have established elite police units in every province, instructors are attached with these police units. Punjab Rangers and SSG have special bond, three of Punjab Rangers director generals namely, Brigadier Humayun Malik, Major General Arshad Hakim Arshad and Major General Haroon Aslam all were former SSG officers, with latter two also remained commander of SSG. In 2005-2007 SSG established, trained and organised the 'Commando Wing' of Punjab Rangers, with Major Abdullah {colonel now} as the very first instructor; SSG also trained the Sind Rangers elite units on similar lines. As highlighted earlier Frontier Corps platoons were regularly attached with SSG in the sixties for training, at present although they are not attached but they are being trained by SSG.

## Chapter VIII

### **Cherat 'Eagles Nest' 1855-2016**

Cherat is synonym with Special Service Group, while driving towards the Peshawar from Rawalpindi, after crossing the River Indus, thirty miles short of Peshawar, on the left, at Pabbi ,a road leads into the

mountains and amidst these hills, on a ridge at an elevation of 4500 feet is Cherat which is more popularly known as Eagles Nest. Cherat was first used as a sanitarium for troops in 1861 and was constructed as cantonment in 1881. It was first noticed by Major Loke while exploring the Mir Kalan route to Kohat. Proposals for its occupation were made, but these fell through for the reason that political entanglements with the Afridi tribes were expected. However, the annual experiment of an autumn camp succeeded so well that it soon becomes a cantonment. In the beginning tents were mainly used for accommodation, brought up by elephants, every summer from the plains. An elephant camp was established at the foot-hills near Chapri which in a hamlets of the village Dag Ismail Khel. Troops used to march by night camping enroute as Jallozai, which is half way between Pabbi and Cherat, avoiding the heat of the day by resting. Ladies and children travelled in bullock tongas which in vogue then. When proper construction of buildings began, stones were brought up from Nowshehra by elephants. The first building was constructed in 1855. In due course a hospital, a club and three churches were built. The church of Scotland is built on the highest points in Cherat. The British regiments occupied Cherat in succession. The first to come was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the North Staffordshire Regiment in 1861 and the last one 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the Black Watch who visited in 1947. Each regiment has left a monument in

from of a crest carved on a rock. Some regiments revisited Cherat in course of history. On second or subsequent visited they have added the date of their revisits to their crest. The crests are beautiful and most artistically done up.

Cherat first came into limelight with a small piece of literature *Venus In India*<sup>20</sup>, published in 1870s. From Nowshehra one has to take either tonga or ride on horses, changing them at Pabbi{also written as Publi}.

*‘from that place{Pabbi} I must make the best of my way to Cherat, for there was no road along which dak gharries could be driven, the said interval between Publi and Cherat was dangerous for travelers, there being many lawless robbers, distance was a good fifteen miles...At last I reached Publi, a small village situated where the road to Cherat turns off. It was full of liveliness, native shops, in which comestibles and sweet meats were exposed for sale, were still open. more or less brilliantly lighted up with—oil lamps, consisting of an earthenware cup and a wick dripping in oil. Men, women and children were moving about, as if the idea of sleep never entered their minds, and the monotonous beat of the favorite tom-tom, rose fitfully on the air. Bullocks, elephants, camels, horses and dogs lined each side of the road, and added their various noises and*

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<sup>20</sup> [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Venus\\_in\\_India/Volume\\_1](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Venus_in_India/Volume_1)

*smells to the general collection.... The scenery I passed through was wild and savage to a degree. We mounted almost perpendicular walls of rock, over which my strong and clever pony climbed in the most cat-like manner, or descended into deep and sandy bottomed ravines, the beds of which at times were irresistible torrents. We skirted precipices, along paths dangerously narrow and often very broken, until we at last reached the foot of the principal hill, up which we had to climb. I let my pony pick his own steps... At last! At last! My pony staggering with immense fatigue and the fearful strain the terrible climb had cost him to reach the top of the spur of the hill, which jutted out from the main mountain range, and formed the buttress by which for the last two hours we had been ascending! Oh! The exquisite, cool, almost cold and bracing breath of real mountain air which swept across my face and filled my lungs with its exhilarating strength! My pony seemed to enjoy it as much as I. For a minute or so he stood and drank in the delicious breath of nature,... ,... I continued my walk along the charming and easy path along the mountainside, delighted with the magnificent expanse of scenery which my lofty position afforded me. Below me were the craggy, rugged serpes, diversified with deep ravines and far jutting spurs, all bearing unmistakable evidence of the fury of the rains which swept their rocky sides. All over these slopes grew innumerable dwarf trees, and shrubs of various kinds but*



*the wild olive seemed to predominate. Far in the distance, rapidly becoming obscured by the thick dusty haze added to the intense heat which was burning up the plain and the valley, I saw two rivers, one was apparently the Indus, which I had crossed at Attock, for I could trace its course to where it emerged from far off mountains and the other was the Cabul river of which I had heard at Nowshera and which flowed only a few hundred yards behind the bungalow ... What made up for a great deal of the discomfort at Cherat was the delicious, cool and bracing air. I felt invigorated and strengthened by it. I enjoyed to the fullest inhaling it; and the savage grandeur of the scenery added enjoyment to breathing the pure mountain breezes which played upon it.... There was at this time in Cherat several officers of other corps or regiments in charge of "Details" who had been sent up from Peshawar to recruit their health in our cool and salubrious air... There were no general barracks at Cherat, except on Sunday morning after divine service, at which the Colonel read prayers. Officers commanding companies paraded them on weekdays at such hours as were convenient, and inspected the men and their arms. The regiment had seen such harassing service in Afghanistan, and had so many sick and feeble in the ranks, that it had been sent, almost at once, to Cherat, with positive orders that there was to be as little work as possible,... The soldiers were, on arrival at Cherat,*

*warned that if they ever went shooting on the mountain sides, they must never be in parties of less strength than five or six, or more than that in number. If fewer, they might be attacked, if greater, it might alarm the natives who might fear attack*

**Post 1947.**After independence the Boys Wing of the Pakistan Armoured Corps was located at Cherat<sup>21</sup>. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1956 that a part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Baloch Regiments was shifted to Cherat.

## SSG and Cherat

When the SSG which infact was 19<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment moved into Cherat, not much had changed from what was written almost seventy years ago. As the American training team headed by Colonel Don Bunte was going to be stationed at Cherat thus an uplift was carried out. Road was made, bungalows were renovated and repaired. The Americans stayed at Cheat till 1960, their number alongwith their families was between 25-30 . Cherat thus had a colorful life pattern, a club was also established, so were the tennis courts .

Water was the main issue, as Cherat is short of any water source, the main source is the Chappri spring. Americans as they were using washing machines , therefore water was rationed to 200 gallons per day per

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<sup>21</sup> Zaheer Khan *The Way it Was*, { Army Book Club, 2000},p-37

family; later another spring and water source was established at Dag Ismail. Under a contract which was signed during the British ear, all construction work had to be given to the local contractors, so was the case with water . The water supply is an interesting phenomena. There is no natural spring here to feed the population, British developed an interesting method, close the end of the knoll on north, they plastered the walls and built two water tanks, thus , all the rain water would just trickle down to these tanks from where through pipes the water was brought to the main mess and bazar. The pipes have broken down other than this the water is still getting in the tanks but none to use it. Presently water is coming up from the Marabba or the Ziarat town, there are three staging stations in between . Cherat was a family station, troops and officers were allotted limited number of huts, bungalows and rooms, there was no lady doctor and as such the very first lady doctor was posted in 1957, a small school was also opened for the children but it remained a main source of concern till 2007, when the present day army Public School was inaugurated close to Chappri. There were no shops, thus mess havildar had to made purchases from Peshawar every second day. For electricity a generator was installed with limited time of operation. Apart from these lack of modern amenities, the other inconvenience at Cherat was the snakes , which were and still are quite in number, ‘ Cherat hills were very steep, covered with wild olives, bushes and were

full of snakes, vipers around Cherat and Kraits in the foothills'. Other notable animal is the panther, one panther was killed in 1952, and other was killed in 1979.

In 1968, the present SSG crest was engraved on the main 'Crest Mountain', a mosque was also constructed in the same year at Cherat. Mess life is thus the main source of relaxation at Cherat .

Cherat underwent major transition in post 1965, when the SSG was reorganized, buildings, offices and residential accommodation was readjusted among the battalions. Before the headquarters and school was shifted from Cherat, the life pattern was almost same it was in early days of SSG. Officers and men undergoing the course , always running in pair, mostly limping in the abinitio stages. All around an air of awe and to some extent an aura of terror for newcomer. Commandos carrying out repelling, assault course , judo and host of other activities, at night firing echoing through the valley. There was only one public bus leaving Cherat at 0900 hours for Pabbi and coming back in evening. School bus leaving with children at 0600 hours and at 1540 arriving back. At retreat the gates of the cantonment would be closed , opened only at commander's orders.

In early days, commander would visit the mess twice a week to have interaction with officers

undergoing training and with those who were staying in bachelors' accommodation. There used to be a guest night every fortnightly. As Major General A.O.Mitha stated ' no discussion or argument on the parade ground, just obey the orders, but in mess I would emphasis to the officers to have discussion and come up with their own ideas on anything and everything under the sun'.

Officers were invited for tea and ice cream at commandant's house once a month

Present

The road from Pabbi to Cherat has changed quite a lot, Road quality is good but there are speed breakers of irrational size and design at irregular intervals, in 2002, SSG officers Major Abdullah and Captain Jawwad were both ambushed here by the dacoits and were robbed, these speed breakers are infact constructed mostly by those notorious gangs , as car speed invariably comes to a grinding halt before crossing them. There are quite a number of construction alongside the road, the famous Jallozai Afghan refugees camp was also located here which has now been constructed with fiber glass material, there are four such huge structures, then the campus of Peshawar University of Technology another grand structure spread over acres. The scenery from midway becomes classic in nature, silence, greenery all

around and a gentle climb, Short of Chapri check post, I had to apply harsh brakes as a Chikoor family was crossing the road, the mother had crossed over and the little baby was following; a rare sight but it seems that it is quite common on this track and path. A new post has been constructed short of Chapri, in front of the army school and college, which is also new . The layout and design alongwith the scenery resembles the Lawrence College of Murree, basketball courts, solar panel, double storied building and fence all around the school, a beautiful school indeed. In the past the children from Cherat used to travel almost thirty odd miles one way to attend the school at Nowshehra and this solves the age old issue. The area all around is now reserve park, with strict instructions not to do any shooting.

The procedure at Chapri is same as in past, you have to get registered and it means that someone from the Cherat has to inform the check post, the road from Chapri to the Cherat cantonment is one way, the gate at the top informs the Chapri on landline about the vehicles coming down and till the time these vehicles do not reach Chapri, no vehicle from Chapri is allowed to go up. After an hour , I set course, in the meanwhile I had little chit chat with the soldiers at the Chapri. The present SSG mess was renovated and inaugurated by Major General Abid Rafique only last year. Mess from inside is comfortable and modern.

While we were exploring the Cherat, we three {myself , Captain Amir and Havildar Qaiser,} went to a house which was reportedly occupied by Major Tariq Mahmood in his youth. The house is on an elevation on the northern ridge, we had to climb the stairs, whole area is green but deserted as most of the buildings have been declared dangerous. House is big and deserted, now, a welding plant is operating from here, the structure is not dangerous in true sense but military way of assessing dangerous especially to a building has very low threshold. Scenery from the corner of the house is breath-taking, as we walked towards the edge, suddenly a wild boar just rushed out and ran away. These pigs are generally un-harmful however if a pregnant pig with recently born babies are approached by anyone, then the pigs react by rushing towards the intruder, other than that a balance is maintained here, now Captain Amir would just clap his hands before approaching any bush and pigs would get alert , either to run or stay at the place.

At present there is electricity, cable network, mobile network, few food shops, souvenir shop, water is still scarce but by and large in abundance. Mess is new and fully furnished, few guestrooms which have been renovated and converted from old structure. At Mitha Chowk in evening there is quite a life, students {including foreigners} buying food items, there is a canteen stores department shop as well. Mess have its

own private Suzuki van which can be hired by anyone on payment. In the playground is a new gymnasium building, basketball, miniature football where children play every evening along with young officers.

Cherat has been the host of all SSG gatherings, which are held once a decade in which all old SSG officers are cordially invited. On 13<sup>th</sup> October 2000, the grandest of all gatherings was held at Cherat Mess in which the Chief Executive General Pervaiz Musharraf was the chief guest, he was the first SSG officer to become the president of Pakistan

Attock Fort , from Mughal Era to SSG

Attock Fort on the home bank of River Indus is in fact a fort on the confluence of River Kabul and River Indus; a confluence of civilisation. One of the most strategic forts of its time as it kept the eye and guard on the Indus Civilisation against the intruders from the Central Asia. Indus which flows down from Himalayas and Karakorum and River Kabul which takes its origin from Tirich Mir and passes through Chitral , joins by River Yarkun and later by a small tributary from Kabul near Jalalabad ; both these rivers join a mortar shell



distance away from present day Attock Fort. Foundation stone of the fort was laid by Great Akbar in August 1581 A.D; completed in a record time of two years. Shams ud Din Khawfi was the architect and engineer; Akbar last visited the fort in 1585. Later with Nadir Shah Durrani invasion 1739 and Ahmad Shah Abdalli in 1761 the fort remained under the control of Kabul till 1818 when Sikhs overthrew the Afghans and entrenched themselves in fort till 1849 when British Annexed the Punjab and fort came under their control.

In 1940 during Second World War, 7 Infantry Division was stationed here. In 1947 after the birth of Pakistan the fort naturally came under our control. Attock Fort become for a while a prisoner of war camp, housing the Indians captured during the Kashmir War 1947-48. Later the Close Quarter Battle School was located there and when it was closed 312 Garrison Company of the Frontier force Regiment was raised and stationed here. On 14<sup>th</sup> February 1956 , 19<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment {SSG} first entered the fort and since then it is home of Special Service Group. In early days of SSG, four companies were stationed here, later in July 1965, under reorganisation, No.2 Rangers Battalion occupied it which naturally in 1966 became 2 Commando Battalion. All SSG battalions have served at Attock under the rotation system; thus this fort and its mess is an integral part of SSG folklore.

The fortifications are over a four miles in circumference and are strengthened with eighteen bastions; all of circular shape except one which is rectangular. *They are built mostly of a local slate and granite rock set in thick lime . The arches, vaultings and domes are in small 'Lahori' brick. The original gateways are in sand stone resembling the one found in Tarki hills near Jhelum. The present main entrance facing the grand trunk road 'Mori' gate properly dates back from the Sikh period but its shorn work and ramp are British. The Kabuli gate on the west is the only old entrance now open to view. It has double gates and is flanked by round towers. The only major fortification added by the British is the "Clyde Battery Embattlements". These are near the river gate overlooking the river. The gun fort holes are directed towards Afghanistan. A well was also sunk but that remains now as the base foundation of the engine. The present day supply of water is however, independent of this well as it is pumped direct from the river into two sedimentation tanks.*<sup>22</sup>

The Grand Trunk Road used to pass in front of the main fort gate 'Mori', leading to the lone railway and road bridge over the River Indus , two miles south of the fort. The crossing of River Indus itself has a history

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<sup>22</sup> From a paper written by Major General retired Hayauddin in 1965, SSG Archives Tarbela.

connected with the Attock Fort. Indus is at its narrowest on the foot of fort. In the 1840s and even before that a boat bridge was placed for crossing of Indus; however in monsoon and in summer it was always risky to cross the Indus. In 1856 the idea of constructing a railway tunnel was contemplated and it was partially constructed in 1862, later a overhead railway and road bridge was completed in 1883. It was in 1970 that present bridge on north of Attock Fort was completed and a three decades later a second bridge was inaugurated making the traffic one way.

After the SSG had camped in the fort, the renovation and repair took place, the present day swimming pool was constructed in 1960, the mosque in 1968 and few other changes have also taken place , but by and large fort retains its original layout. The Fort have three main gates, known as Mori {on the east} Delhi on the north and the Kabul gate on the west. Inside the fort, the layout is not even rather it is slopping from east-west with a steep gradient, separating the fort into two distinct halves. The western lower portion was for the troops and the followers where as the royal accommodation was on the eastern and upper half, the gate separating them is known as Lahori gate. The senior SSG officer in the Attock fort also acted as the station commander, till seventies, the lone railway road bridge used to be closed for all public crossing and transport

thus , SSG officer used to give the crossing permit after sunset.

The Mess and few buildings were constructed outside the fort perimeter during early half of last century. Mess itself underwent major renovation in 2000, when the false ceilings and tiles were incorporated in the bachelor's accommodation and in the main mess as well. It is a difficult task to convert old structure into a new and modern style. Thus present rooms lack the windows, have bathrooms almost equal to the main bedroom. Presently another major work is underway in which a green lawn in front of mess is being levelled and efforts are underway to make it green. Attock does not have shortage of water, there is a well inside the main fort compound and moreover water is pumped from the river as well.

Fort walls are thick and have double layers, thus having width enough in the walls for the sentries and troops to live and fight independently. There is space enough for the troops to have a green football ground, cemented basketball and squash courts as well. Around the outer walls are wild growth with plenty of pigs , jackals and snakes. Inside the fort the most enigmatic engraving is that of Star of David on the Kabul Gate; none knows when and who engraved it. There are so many bats inside the haunted portions of the fort that it is difficult to walk under the arches due to their stench, the

stench of bats is so powerful that for days it becomes part of the nostrils.

Presently the SSG Battalion keeps the fort in working condition, repairing and renovating with own resources, planting trees and flowers all around. Plaques of SSG battalions which have been stationed here adds a history to the already rich heritage. There are many folklores associated with fort and adjoining places, every now and then some ancient coin or tunnel is discovered by commandos. On the northern side is a sarai which is known as Begum ki Sarai , it was commissioned by Emperor Jahangir's wife. The old cemetery is also located close by , now only remnants of one odd graves are left.

Presently, the security is of highest order with multiple check posts between the road and the mess. Students undergoing the commando courses have to spent almost 4-6 weeks here for explosives, small and heavy weapons firing. The ranges are outside the perimeter of the fort. In the morning and in evening the fort is buzzing with the cheerful and morale boosting slogans of student course. Their presence also liven up the mess life. The mess retains its old glamour with modern amenities like electricity, television, table tennis, billiard to name few. As the story goes, decade ago, officers especially the married ones, would gather at the mess to play bridge during weekends. Commanding

Officer was not fond of it, thus the field officers on weekends would call up their jeeps with trailer, dressed in the uniform, they would pretend as going to the exercise and all would gather at the mess and have happy time. It was the dog of one field officer which blew up the secret, one of the lady wife noticed the dog sitting outside and after bit of inquiry, the mess waiters came up with the secret and soon all lady wives raided the mess and caught their husbands red handed; historians are quiet on what happened next.

Food is an integral part of SSG Mess culture, with food it means enormous food. In SSG none takes one egg omelet, it is unlike SSG if the omelet is less than of six eggs. Lieutenant colonel Mitha narrates that , one day I was coming back from Rawalpindi and I decided to stay at Attock, Major Afridi was the only officer present in the mess, we had food , he ordered an omelet of a dosen eggs and then had half a dosen mangoes as well. The officer is known as ‘Twelve Eggs Afridi’.

**Buddy** system in SSG is the strongest bond among the commando group. From the induction stage in both soldiers and officers commando course, on the very first day, each one is asked to pick and choose his buddy. The men who joins the SSG, already have few years of service and as such invariably when officers appear for the initial tests, they come in pair; an officer influencing the other. Buddies are supposed to be

together throughout the course, undergoing all punishments together, at the end of the course it is a policy to post both the buddies together in a commando unit. In case of soldiers, it is much easier as quite a number of them are posted in each commando battalion. During the long war, many have lost their buddies; they do make new buddies during operations but they are always known with reference to the original pairing. A buddy is more than mere friend or fellow officer, he is the one on whom you trust with your life. Colonel Rizwan Lashari and lieutenant colonel Haroon Islam shaheed were buddies, 'we used to share the same underwear and vests...our money was lying together in the drawer...we would proceed on leave combined...in short we were just twins, knowing each other, families, values, it helped a lot in operations'. President General Musharraf changed the name first son Shahryar to Bilal, in the honour of his buddy Major Bilal who embraced martyrdom in 1971 War.

**Company.** In SSG the basic brick is the company in each battalion, an officer and soldier after the induction course are posted to battalions, where the commanding officer at his will posts them to the four odd companies in the battalion. After posting in the company, like Liaqat, Shaheen, Hamza, Zikriya, Ayub to name few, the officer adopts it as his new home and family ; a bond that will last till the last. Thus in SSG

officers and soldiers prefer to be referred more with their company name than the battalion, Captain {lieutenant colonel} Adnan Bashir Dhariwal, when blessed with his first son, named him after his parent company Hamza. The companies have their own culture, they are semi autonomous in nature, have their own cook houses and recreation halls.

**Commando Rivalry.** In army, rivalry among battalions, corps and regiments is taken as a healthy and positive sign. In SSG the rivalry between the *Yaldram* and *Powindah* is now almost legendary and a folk lore, whether it is training, sports, administration or the operations, each battalion tries its utmost best to outclass the other. These battalions have no problem if they are beaten by any other commando unit in sports but to lose to the rival is almost a regimental mourning day. In operations , whenever these battalions have been combined, each one tries to acquire a target which is more difficult, higher and further than the other. During Operation Zarb Azab, in North Waziristan Agency, both battalions were together, one with each infantry division. Commanding officer of Yaldram had to plead with the general officer commanding Major general Nadeem, to be allotted the highest mountain for capture , he highlighted that Powindah in other division is tasked a much higher target and this is not good for his battalion. As the tale goes, the GOC declined to alter the plan, later



at night and next day the Yaldarm captured not only the task given to them but also reached the target of Powindahs.

SSG culture is restricted and closely guarded, it is introvert in a manner that non SSG officers and soldiers are kept at a distance. It is only in recent past that SSG have established headquarters and other institutions at Tarbela, which is comparatively more accessible than the Attock and Cherat cantonments. In all these cantonments, entry of military officers is also restricted unless and until they have been invited by the SSG officers, none can enter these cantonments, same holds true for other ranks. A SSG officer prefers to have company of fellow SSG officer rather than anyone else. When these commando units do operate with other formations, the efforts are to keep the SSG as a separate entity both in operations and in administrative matters. It is a male oriented culture thus ladies are seldom seen or talked about; children and pets are an exception as commandos can spent hours and hours talking about children and pets. In SSG majority of officers do have pets, ranging from cobra to wolf. However dogs are the most common, among the other ranks the trend is not that much and at the most they do have a bird in cage.

In SSG, games are mandatory so is morning PT, anyone missing from morning PT is fined with a chicken. In the evening the games are only football,

basketball and rugby. All these are played with improvised rules, in which nothing is foul as long as the player is not seriously hurt. By their own traditions SSG does not take part in sports competitions held by other formations. This tradition was setup in early days, as in the eyes of Lieutenant Colonel Mitha it was wastage of time. SSG also does not have Quarterguard as in vogue in rest of the army. They believe in keeping the barracks neat and clean but any commando battalion which indulges in whitewash especially before any visit is always looked down by other battalions.

## Chapter IX

### SSG Uniform and Insignias

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1969, Special Service Group as a separate corps came into being and thus were authorised to wear the distinctive cap badge, shoulder titles and badges of rank. It was thus now an independent brigade with Brigadier {Pakistan Army No1158} Sherullah beg as the first commander ,and subedar Major Latif Shah as the first SM of the group.

Special Service Group have a distinctive uniform of green camouflage and insignia which highlights the

professional competence and achievement. From 1955-1965, there was nothing unusual or distinctive about the SSG uniform, they being part of Baluch regiment were wearing the same dress as by other Baluch Regiments, green berets and khaki uniform. After the establishment of Parachute Training School at school and with conduct of airborne training, the case to change the beret colour into Maroon was taken up and also to wear the para insignia.

Para efficiency wing was introduced in 1968 , it was awarded after completion of 100 jumps, Frogman insignia was also introduced in same year.<sup>23</sup>Rigger, written on SSG Brevet highlights the efficiency and the fact that commando is capable of packing and rigging the parachutes. SSG for the first time took part in National Day Parade in 1968 with its own distinct style of marching. This marching in which the SSG contingent marches with rifles holding in right hand, knees touching chest, in a running style and above all the recitation of *Haq Haq* and *Allah Ho* has made SSG march past an event which the spectators look forward.

In 1970-1971 the uniform underwent transition, the famous Green and camouflage smog jacket was introduced in whole army, SSG made a modification,

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<sup>23</sup> Summary of important Items/Measures introduced/implemented/recommended since February 1968, File No.35, SSG Archives Tarbela.

that tucked in the khaki trouser and since then SSG had always worn a uniform with trouser tucked in. In mid-seventies the Pakistan day parade attained a greater value , with live television coverage. The Parade was held at Rawalpindi Parade Ground, the Parachute Jump was made part of it and for next decade and half, it was Brigadier Tariq Mahmood who used to lead it. All SSG commanders since then always perform this free fall alongwith the team.

Commando knife was an integral part of the SSG uniform from 1965 onwards, it was put on the web belt. The web belt itself, green in colour and made of canvas was an unique item by itself; it had one runner only, other pushed to the rear.

The scarf is another item of uniform, it has always been white on parade, but in late eighties the parachute cloth scarf was very in. The SSG uniforms are not governed by the army dress regulations in the strict sense. Officers and men do wear the dress items either by choice or by necessity. For instance, in early eighties the winter dress code of regular army specified Great coat as the official winter dress item for officers {Great Coat has always been the officers winter dress item since WWI} but SSG preferred to wear the green American field jackets.

SSG when even wearing the standard dress of Khaki had a way to blend a dash of its own. Brigadier Tariq Mahmood being its longest commander is attributed with setting many examples and trends. Keeping the top button of uniform shirt open, rolling of sleeves with one twist became a hallmark of SSG officers and men; especially of commanders at all levels. This has landed many officers of SSG in warm waters with field formations.

Beard is another distinction of SSG, although at present the trend is not as much as is past especially during General Zia tenure. SSG keeps beard for many reasons, religion is one, ease, comfort and style is other factor. Moustaches and especially long moustaches are a trend I regular army , where regiments have such soldiers employed on Quarterguard and regimental police duties; in SSG seldom any one has kept long moustaches.

In 2007, army made drastic changes in dress code and uniform; belt was removed from the uniform and camouflage of brown colour was introduced. SSG although it retained its green colour camouflage but belt was no more part of it. In the same era , the green smog jacket, white scarf and khaki trouser were also bid farewell. The insignias under the new changes were made smaller in size , instead of metallic ranks the smaller collar dox and web ranks in front of uniform

were introduced which are still in practice. Shoes are now of polish less suede, khaki in colour with green socks. Zarrar Anti terrorist battalion wears black dress with maroon beret, Para Training school also wears black coverall. SSG headquarters at its won had initiated manufacturing and purchase of camouflage green jersey, which it issues to soldiers on payment, also camouflage parka has been introduced by Headquarters SSG.

SSG does not have any mess kit, neither they have any staff duties dress, the officers when requires wears the standard winter mess kit as in regular army. For sports and fatigue duties SSG introduced its own tracksuits in 2011-12. Yalgaar Battalion was the first commando battalion to do so, Mr Amir Hussain was the manufacturer and soon almost all commando battalions had the track suits; later headquarters SSG introduced a standard tracksuit for all battalions. The track suit is in maroon colour. Also a maroon woollen cap was introduced not only for sports but it is very useful during night guards in winter and in operations.

For Mess dress, SSG officers are more open, seldom is the restriction of lounge suit imposed in any mess gathering but officers are encouraged to wear so; SSG do have a regimental tie and scarf. In 2002, trouser and shirt was made mandatory for troops to wear at least one day in week. A mess night is observed every week in soldiers mess in same dress, main philosophy behind

was to encourage the commandos to feel the trouser and shirt, as they have to perform duties with foreign delegations also quiet frequently.

SSG insignia shows a commando knife as if shooting from a lightening strike and exploded with a star of eternal glory<sup>24</sup>

## History of History.

27<sup>th</sup> July 2016. Attock Fort Mess, 1100 hours.

Sitting in the TV lounge , outside it is bit gloomy due to overcast weather, it rain in the night , I am staying in guest room No.3, the barrack is old British era which has been converted into rooms with air conditioners but they do not have any window, yes not a single window in the entire room same is the case with other guest rooms thus you have to rely upon the air conditioners and they in turn rely upon the electricity which is not available all the time, load shedding here is bit more than the Rawalpindi, add the foam mattress and ryan bed sheet and you have a perfect nightmarish sleep.

I came here on 25<sup>th</sup> July at midnight, all my own fault, infact almost a month ago I was invited by Brigadier Shujaat of Cherat brigade to have a meeting

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<sup>24</sup> SSG History File No.35, SSG Archives Tarbela.

with Major General Bhutta, in connection with the writing of SSG history. Thus I travelled to Tarbela amidst Ramadan and stayed there three nights, met the general and sort out the key issues like no money, pay for my own messing and accommodation gratis and that is all. SSG have maintained an archive in which all operations are entered and kept uptodate, they are in two volumes. My point of view is that much has been written about the past thus focus will be on the War Against Terror. The working pattern of SSG headquarters is no different from any other formation in a sense that 'buck will be passed on to the other' thus none was taking the responsibility to assist in the history in terms of a clerical staff etc. Lieutenant Colonel Amjad is performing as GSO 1 Intelligence , I know him through my cousin Lt Col Adnan, who also commanded 4 commando battalion and relinquish command last year. The present commanding officer of 4 Commando Lt Col Jawwad is another close friend of Adnan and me too. The stay at Tarbela was good and useful, I have been coming here on regular basis but this time as the aim was more specific thus more focus. It was Ramadan and I had an iftarri with the officers almost all commanding officers at Tarbela were present most notably Lt Col Niazi commanding 3 Commando Battalion. Not only he is talkative but have a plethora of tales, almost all SSG officers are master in story narrating yet few have such variety of tales as Niazi have; he won the Golden Dagger



or the best student of advance commando training course. He and Jawwad are long lasting friends. Major now Lt Col ....of signals was just promoted and he too have many narrations.

Now, after the Eid , I was feeling pathetic myself in Aviation mess , doing nothing but smoking and that is all , this is how I almost decided to run to the Attock Fort. During my stay in Tarbela, I was advised to visit the Attock Fort where 6 Commando battalion is stationed, the commanding officer Lt Col Shahid is wounded at present, he sustained bullet injuries three months ago during operation at Miranshah, he is part of Cherat brigade and as such the overall responsibility of the history compilation. I arrived at Attock before iftaar and later had a discussion on the layout and pattern of the book. His questions and queries are no different from all others who are compiling the history for first time; thus my base of operation has to be the Attock Fort and I was happy to have a deep look inside this historic fort.

Thus I made a call to him on 25<sup>th</sup> July and later set course from aviation mess on my vintage Mercedes, the car is important as it creates new tales every now and then . The red light was on the panel but I disregard it and later when I stopped at petrol pump it was revealed that one tyre is puncture, bit of more journey and when I halted for a cup of tae at a roadside motel { Mahriya hotel} for food, later car refused to start and I had

already annoyed the waiters by asking what are these service charges which you have included in my bill and thus refused to give him tip. Now , I needed a push to start the Mercedes but was reluctant to ask for waiters help due to this incident, however the owner was sensible he offered me help but luckily Mercedes got started and I realised that red light is that of generator not being charged, anyway to cut a long story short , I managed to arrive at the fort at 2345 hours.

Attock Fort at present , has a tight security, the outer sentries at the gate , stops you and then pass the information about any officer entering into fort to the commanding officer, in my case luckily they were being told in advance, then from gate a mile long winding road which at present is in good shape and one reaches the top, on the right is the main gate of fort and on left the road leads to the officers mess and other residential area. Mess waiter Anwar was there so was the mess havildar, I felt guilty of being late , mess havildar informed me that in SSG they have daily Physical training in morning thus they have to sleep early and they were awake just because of me, later a cup of tea and I was in my room about which I have narrated earlier.

Past -1986

In military academy, there is a lore and myth about SSG, they used to wear the camouflage uniform where as the rest of the army was wearing the khaki ,

almost every cadet will confess in person that he wants to join the SSG. In academy the cadets are selected after physical test for parachute jumping course which allows them to wear the parachute wing on their right chest. I was physically not very fit thus I failed to pass the test.

SSG became famous or darling of the public due to annual Pakistan day parade in which the SSG contingent would also march past the dias but there uniform was different and more importantly their style of marching was more like running with 'kness hitting the nipples' the culminating point was the parajumps which became synonym with Brigadier Tariq Mehmood alias TM ; he was the most popular living army officer a kind of hero. In my childhood, one of our neighbours was a retired lieutenant colonel {Ghias} a veteran of World War 2, one of his son Ayaz later joined army and SSG too, thus when I was coming to join the military academy, I spent the last night in there house in Westridge, I saw albums of Captain Ayaz and came to know that he is in SSG, his mother narrated how tough the course is.

My first choice of regiment was infantry but I was commissioned in an Ack Ack regiment and I decided then and there that I will join the SSG, and that is how I spent the years of lieutenant ship and there by ruined my basic course as well because I will be joining the SSG. One of my cousin Captain Salik Nawaz

Cheema was also in 127 Regiment stationed at Sargodha and living on the first floor of same Bachelor Officers Quarters {BOQs} we were the best of friends our interests were common, military history and Robert Ludlum and to pursue our this fantasy there was no place better than the SSG thus we both decided to join it but joining is not just one's wish, there is a military procedure involved.

During the year 1985, we both were lucky to be a member of the Pakistan day parade, the causes are complicated but in short , army has inducted a new radar Giraffe and we both found ourselves as part of new team alongwith six more officers, I was the junior most, we lived in tents at Ojhari camp and later moved to Anti aircraft mess in Rawalpindi, it was here that we came across few SSG officers who were taking part in the parade too that included Captain Liaquat 'Lucky' a classical SSG officer who had so many tales to narrate, at night we will sit around him in the ante room and he would start and then over cup of teas and coffees , the tales will carry on, mostly about the beating of such and person, affairs with such and such airhostess, SSG was employed then as air guard as well and it was a major attraction as officers and soldiers of SSG were on board in every flight of PIA including international flights which for us junior officers was a tale of Arabian Nights.

The procedure for induction in SSG was simple, you fill the form at specified date, not before that, it has to be signed by commanding officer, then vetted by brigade commander and then the divisional commander before it reaches GHQ and finally you get the army letter which authorise you to be present at Attock Fort for initial tests and interview. Very few commanding officers were interested in sending the young officers even to appear before the tests. In Infantry it was bit simple as majority of young officers appear for the advance infantry training course which was conducted at Cherat and a kind of miniature commando course. There was short cut too, you can write directly to the Brigadier TM and he would ensure that you come for the tests, we adopted the same path after our commanding officers were reluctant to send forward our applications. By law, none can stop any volunteer in army including this course.

It was Muharram, and after the Muhararm leaves we both were supposed to be at Attock, thus Salik and myself we both travelled on roof of the public bus from Sargodha to Attock at night and got down at Attock Fort. From gate till mess we walked singing and joking. At Mess there were small tents pitched for us, there were around thirty odd junior officers who had come for the test, all in all over three hundred applies for SSG. The initial tests were tough, running and a long route march

which was dubbed as after dinner walk but lasted till wee hours of morning. The repelling and the most notorious the test around the pool or the Tunnel Test. It is this test which breaks the will of majority of officers who have lasted till here. The test is , that you are given a task to steal something from the end of tunnel and you are caught by enemy and then how you last because enemy tortures you. Thus the feeling of darkness in a tunnel of five hundred years old fort, and all o fa sudden an unexpected kick or a punch and then you are captured and interrogated which naturally includes torture in form of beating; very few officers can bear this; finally an interview with the Brigadier TM and other officers to have a final assessment of you. The question in board are not regular kind of questions but rather ‘what was the most embarrassing moment of your life ‘ types and in the end you are told about the result; both Salik and me were selected. One of the soldier Sepoy Zulfiqar in Attock was from my regiment, I was not knowing it but he send me grapes as a gift.

The joy , happiness and self confidence which one attains after just passing this test is beyond words to explain, there was a gap of a week in between the tests and the course.

31<sup>st</sup> July 2016, Guest Room No 3, 1915 Hours.

The dim noise of the air conditioner is on, now I am used to it but still it is uncomfortable, I mean the air. Anyway I am lazy, I should have kept the journal update daily as I missed the flair and continuity but this is a core issue with me.

Let me start from beginning, after I settled in guest room, next day I went into the fort to meet the commanding officer Lt Col Shahid, the mess is located on the east of fort gate approximately five hundred yards on a high ground. Infact the fort is constructed on a high ridge and the present day road passing over the bridges over Indus was made only in 1979, before that the road followed the old railway and road bridge which lies to the south of the fort. In short the construction of bridges and road have put a layer of mist over the history.

I had a cup of tea sitting on the deck of the mess, the deck is facing northward and allows a panoramic view of sun setting and the vast expanse of River Indus on north. There is a construction going on in the mess, a lawn is being made on the base of mess deck, they have levelled the place, put on earth and stones and now the levelling and construction of the wall is under process thus tractor trolley and masons working.

There is a regimental check post across the small road, the sentries were puzzled to see me and after brief introduction I walked inside the fort. The first gate is

classical {Mori gate}it it have two layers, the road takes a bend after crossing the first gate and then fifty yards later another gate both made of strong wood.

The fort was constructed between 1581-1583 by Mughul Emperor Akbar and is considered to be among the finest piece of fort architecture. Later with Nadir Shah Durrani invasion 1739 and Ahmad Shah Abdalli in 1761 the fort remained under the control of Kabul till 1818 when Sikhs overthrew the Afghans and entrenched themselves in fort till 1849 when British Annexed the Punjab and fort came under their control and finally in 1947 the Pakistan took birth and fort's this portion is obscure but from 1954 onwards till to date it is the birth place of SSG, a battalion of SSG has remained in the fort till to date.

1<sup>st</sup> August 2016.

Another wasted day, did nothing except lying lazily and sitting on the mess deck, there was a PT test in the morning for soldiers. Last night Captain Hussnain came to my room rather unexpectedly and sat for hours narrating his story, how he came to join SSG and later some of the incidents of the course. The survival exercise is off three days duration in the course in which the officers are tied and blindfolded and then just thrown away on grass in summer, later in the night they are put into a room full of mosquitoes and beaten too. Hussnain narrated how he seriously thought of filtering the urine ,



in order to drink it, he narrated how his NCB once walked close by after washing clothes in the river and Hussnain just suck his NCBs wet trouser in order to squeeze few drops of water. In the course were two Africans, one from Azerbaijan, two from Sri Lanka and two Palestinians as well. Each nationality have different characteristics. Sri Lankan would remain quiet during beating so were the Africans and Palestinians but Pakistani officers will howl on each strike, on the other hand during water torture the Pakistanis were comfortable but all other were shrieking. Water torture is one in which a towel is wrapped closely around a mouth of person, one of the training staff would sit on the chest and other staff would hurl the water to the tortured person, this water thus goes straight to the mouth during breathing and thus causes immense pain. At the end of this ordeal the dried blood of goat and raw blood of pigeon is given to the tortured officers. This and many other tales were narrated by him, it was him who told me about the PT test in the morning. Officers' test are taken and held separately, these tests are conducted twice a year. It includes four miles of running with pack, followed by 11 chinups, 23 push ups and thirty nine odd reach ups. Anybody failing in any test is given a second chance and if failed again is reverted back to the unit but it seldom occurs, because if anyone fails in test then he is given extra PT periods as well thus no reason to dodge.

The laod shedding is more here in Attock, later I went to the mess , it is thirty odd feet away, mess waiter Anwaar is a good waiter very cheerful and dedicated, had the breakfast on the deck, a paratha , omelette and tea, quality of water is good, very enjoyable. Oh yes , last night Hussnain also told me to try the dairy farm milk, let me try today. There are few odd old pictures of the Fort on web and battalion has got them framed, mostly taken by Jason Burke in 1870s. They are four in number, I concentrated on these pictures in order to correlate the past with present, by and large geography has not changed much in these hundred years.

Later in the evening, I changed into my walk dress and stroll to the fort, came to know that today there are no games rather a route march, so I jogged down to the main check post and later came back up. I cannot jog all the way but I try to run as much as I can, this is the beauty of SG and off Attock Fort that it is natural to walk , run and exert as much as you want and can. Two glasses of lemonade at the mess overlooking the northern side, today visibility was poor , on a good day as it was three days ago one can see the Malakand mountain ridges, they look close and it helps in understanding the geography and the later events taking place in this area. In the mess on dinner I met major Kashif , he came and joined the unit today, he is coming after a stint as Directing staff in Infantry school Quetta. He seems to be

full of manners which is natural as he is coming from infantry school. I asked rather inquired about the life pattern

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2016

Same routine but I was up at 0700 hours, today I have paln with an oofficer, so far I am bad in remembering the names but he is the one who has recently joined after doing a yaer course at Fredicks burgh in Virginia with Marines. Couple of days ago when I met him for the first time on mess deck, I found him a clear headed officer, it is the effect of spending a yaer abroad. He talked about the marines and the routine there. The fact that he was given a brand new kit, the physical excercises , the mind set of marines where the aim is to capture a city anywhere in world, the pallanning phase of it , the abundance of resources. He was feeling good that in the class, in one of the period the instructor showed four pictures and none could identify any one but he was able to do so, one was the picture of Bait Ullah Mahsud.

At ten, I drove with him in jeep towards the firing ranges, he is officer in charge of the soldiers basic commando course. One has to be very attentive and careful whenever any SSG officer is behind the wheels, the extra extra long starter , he gave to the diesel engine alarmed me, as one can gauge a driver from the way he starts a jeep. The fdrive to the ranges took us across the

bridge and indus into khairbad and than drive along the river, crossing the railway bridge and finally driving off track before the sound of firing reached our ears. Enroute there is a monument, which a soldier inquired but captain was not sure and we decided to visit on our way back.

Ranges are ranges, shouting, running and firing , the fact that soldiers commando course is there makes it more lively. In army , this si the hardest and toughest course. These soldiers were having there tests also, which I saw later. Under a fly, I met another officer and two more, whom I have met earlier, light conversation and soon I got up with camera and started taking the pictures. On one side a staff was carrying out the PT, on other another staff was conducting the para PT, then , I saw the field medical test being carried out. One soldier was lying on ground posing as the injured soldier and other soldiers in turn were called and instructed to either evacuate him or give first aid to him. The atmosphere was so lively or at least I was feeling in this way, I was enjoying the typical staff's vocabulary and taunts . A bit away , I noticed one soldier just rolling on the ground, faces of all soldiers were darkened with mud and polish, a staff was sitting on stool camp, ordering the soldier to keep rolling, these were those soldiers whom , the other staff have sent mainly for being naughty.

I did fired with Mime Rifle, it is an American 5.62 calibre, thus not meant to kill a person, it is light weight. The officer told me that 500 rounds of this rifle's ammunition is almost weigh at par with 50 rounds of old 7.62mm calibre'; bit of exaggeration but by and large it is less heavy. Rocket launcher firing was being carried out at a higher ground, it was out of sight but the roar of thunder was visible. RPG-7 has an effective range of 300 yards, and its rocket opens its fins after 30 meters of flight, a highly effective weapon both in the hand of insurgent and military.

Later I drove back with Captain Noman and we did halted at the monument, it is a Punjab Regiment {40 Pathan also known as 16 Punjab}, with few plaques having names engraved on it, it was placed here in 1947; the question arises why this monument was built here and why not at Punjab Regiment Centre at Mardan ? no readily available answer. Took some snaps from the other end of the river , the Kabul gate looks magnificent even in such a state of affairs. The soldiers basic course is moving to Peshawar on Friday and I do have intention off moving with them on my own car. The Cannon camera's battery is running low and I have forgotten the charger at village, thus I am conserving the battery by taking only minimum pictures, lousy of me.

In the office area, met the second in command Major Hasnain Khan , he is from Attock area , I

discussed with him the history write up. The regiment {6 Commando} have sent a format to all the units on the data of the history and so far none has replied back. Other day I saw the letter or the file and was bit disappointed to see the 'immediate' signal classification. It is a common practice in army , I remember , back in 1985, when I was adjutant om my regiment {58 Medium Ack Ack} the same prefix was used by the clerks, for all letters ranging from the sports programme to pay and ration matters. My new commanding officer Lt Col Ilyas was coming from logistics school and was very particular on such matters, he pointed me out in a way that I felt ashamed of using it again. In the army course also it is highlighted that immediate is the next important after the Flash signal, which is normally used in emergency; for all other the appropriate prefix is 'routine' classification. The reason why it is so irritating or important is the fact that , it is these minor matters which indicate mindset and working philosophy.

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

Going out for running, yesterday was Azadeh's eighteenth birthday, how much I missed her. I went for a walk and thought of all those days and time , the day she was born, infact, Samina had to rush to the hospital at night, we were in Quetta, and in the morning when I went to CMH, Azadeh was lying in the cot. What a joy it

was to be the father of a daughter. It was a painful walk, I kept thinking of her, her pranks, her jokes, her anger, laughter, play. I was having a minor fracture in Gujranwala back in 1999, she was a year old then, thus Samina would take Salik to the school and the herself to CMH and we both were there in the hot room, no air conditioner, it was August but what a joy full time with her.

August 9<sup>th</sup> Monday.

It is drizzling outside, I am about to leave Attock for Cheraat.

1830 hours, Cherat, sitting in the guestroom at Cherat officers mess, waiting for the attendant to bring rather fetch some cloth hangars, it is an issue which is in all the messes , you cannot find hangars, the mess staff point of view is that often guest takes them along, it was same at Aviation mess and also at Attock Fort Mess. Well , I was able to leave the Attock at 1300 hours, it had drizzle in the morning, yesterday it was a volleyball final match between the Jaffar and Talha companies, I reached there at 1715 hours, I was looking for Naik Asif whom I had met I the office area , he seems quite ratioanl and knowledgeable about the fort past. He is from 4 Commando battalion and was inducted in SSG in 2005-6, thus he was able to relate the progress within the fort

in last ten years. The barracks whose roof had been blown away in the recent thunderstorm was infact an old barrack which the Americans restored and was used as the living barracks for them. The present mosque was also renovated recently so is the cemented track which leads from Delhi gate to the office area. Major Zafran the 2IC had informed me that the Kabul gate can be opened from inside and keys are with the RPs. As it was getting late and I did not wanted to disrupt the game thus I just walked around, saw the adiry farm with almost two dosen of buffaloes and equal number of calves; they look cute. I had a talk with Naik Asif , in which I had highlighted that in the past the fort also used to accommodate the horses and elephants thus the layout of the fort has to be in a manner where living was separate from the animals stack.

I cleared the mess bill which is around 8400 rupees, the cost of living has gone higher, for a serving officer it is not much but for a pensioner it means something but than this is how it is. The good and unique thing about this mess is the way they present the mess bill, just like the bill in a restaurant, the bill paper comes in leather bound folder, other than that , I am disappointed with the standards of the mess. It is not a critique on the guest room or the furnisher which in any acse is a regular army feature. It is the food menu, last night it was daal and a shaami kebab, now this kind of menu is good enough for



anyother mess but when one thinks of the calories burnt by these commando officers from early morning till late night than one becomes critical. The standar of food has gone down in officers mess and has markedly improved in the soldiers and junior commissioned officers mess. They do not have to pay for their food, rather the state pays for it and only recently {Genearl Kayani} doubled the ration scale, which agin is not appropriate, it seems to be a 'vote getting' act. Yes for SSG one can accept but for supply and ordnance the scale being doubled is a waste of money. It is no secret that army units do sell their extra ration , even when it aws at low sacle and now with this ration the act becomes more frequent and regular. On the other hand an officer is not given free ration but he is paid ration money that also started in general akyani, the army rules stipulates that bill of officers mesing should not be more than one third of his pay , which in present even for a second lieutenant is less than ten thousand but the food values in terms of calories and variety is below the required standards in almost all the messes.

Anyway, I left and drove in Mercedez which is ahvinga battery issue but as the slope was present thus no issue in getting strted. It took me almot over an hour to reach the pabbi, bought two roasted corn from the road side, they are selling it at rupees twenty five per corn , where as in oislamabd it was being sold at rupees

twenty per cent. Majority of the vehicles had put on the Pakistan flag in one way or the other as 14<sup>th</sup> August is getting close by. Traffic is haphazard and one has to be careful while driving, I twice had narrow brushes with a car coming from opposite direction and the other making a sharp turn.

The road from Pabbi to Cherat has changed quite a lot, last I came here in 2002, but it was at night and my cousin major Adnan was here and before that it was in 1992 when I came here with Samina as part of the squadron trip from Peshawar and before that it was in 1986 when I came here to attend the advance commando course. Road quality is good but there are speed breakers of irrational size and design at irregular intervals, in 2002, SSG officers major Abdullah and Captain Jawwad were both ambushed here by the adepts and were robbed, these speed breakers are in fact constructed mostly by those notorious gangs, as car speed invariably comes to a grinding halt before crossing them. There are quite a number of construction alongside the road, the famous Jalozai Afghan refugees camp was also located here which has now been constructed with fibre glass material, there are four such huge structures, then the campus of Peshawar University of Technology another grand structure spread over acres. I remember the spots which I had traversed during the commando course, Salik came to my mind again and again as I was his

buddy. From the SSG training area the road becomes less travelled, the walls of the training area are a sore sight, neither the construction is solid nor the height is enough, the top layer is without any barbed wires. This is the issue which has plagued almost every arm and corps of the army, state gives money and funds for the construction of these walls and units try to save money out of these funds resultantly the security walls are seldom up to the expectation and counter the threat. Only wall worth referring is at the Mahsud Scouts at Fort Salop.

The scenery from midway becomes classic in nature, silence, greenery all around and a gentle climb, it is almost impossible not to think of the past when the British choose this place as a cantonment , they constructed the track and later road, all dating back to 1860, the construction material was brought here on the elephants, one of the best book on the subject is Venus in India, which is an adult reading material written by an British officer posted at Nowshehra and Cherat. Short of Chapri checkpoint, I had to apply harsh brakes as a Chikoor family was crossing the road, the mother had crossed over and the little baby was following; a rare sight but it seems that it is quite common on this track and path. A new post has been constructed short of Chapri, in front of the army school and college, which is also new . The layout and design alongwith the scenery

resembles the Lawrence College of Murree, basketball courts, solar panel, double storeyed building and fence all around the school, a beautiful school indeed. In the past the children from Cherat used to travel almost thirty odd miles one way to attend the school at Nowshehra and this solves the age old issue.

The procedure at Chapri is same as in past, you have to get registered and it means that someone from the Cherat has to inform the checkpoint, the road from Chapri to the Cheart cantonment is oneway, the gate at the top informs the Chapri on landline about the vehicles coming down and till the time these vehicles do not reach Chapri, no vehicle from Chapri is allowed to go up. After an hour , I set course, in the meanwhile I had little chit chat with the soldiers at the Chapri, the old scenes came back , I had gone many times on Chapri, to an extent that in the end Captain Farruk told me to go solo, otherwise one has to go with the buddy, whether it is only his fault but this is how buddy system works here in SSG. I enjoyed the drive to the top , beautiful and one of the classic drives . Cherat looks familiar and it seems quite a construction has taken place, mostly buildings and offices, I kept on driving and finally reached the mess which is slightly ahead of the catholic church which itself dates back to 19th century. PAF also have their small mess with its peculiar design, they have bigger rooms as compare to the army standards. The

present SSG mess was renovated and inaugurated by Major General Abid Rafique only last year. Mess from inside is comfortable and modern, I tried to figure out the old rooms in which I stayed but they it seems all have gone and new constructions have come up.

Now , for last two hours I am trying rather waiting for the attendant to come and take the clothes for ironing, but an hour ago , one soldier came and brought three hangars but the attendant is missing and it is getting dark so I better go and find him.

10<sup>th</sup> August 2016. 0815 hours.

Chirping of birds outside and exhaust fan humming noise inside, a fresh morning. Night was ok, last evening , I had gone to mess in search of waiter and also for dinner, I sat in the dining hall and found that there are no fans in it only air conditioners and that is not acceptable as weather requires only fan, but this is another dilemma with these newly renovated messes, they all have been done by interior designers and not the users thus such issues. Mess seems to be no better than any other mess the confusion, noise in the kitchen, tasteless chicken, I usually ask for green peppers with the food, chapatis also white and thin.

Meanwhile Captain Amir came and after shaking hands informed me that a eighty six years old subedar major of 3 commando battalion is here, his sons are now

brigadier. This old man had come with his grandchildren and his son who happens to be a retired major of 3 SP. Well , I met him in the adjoining guestroom and had bit of talk which was almost impossible to conduct as the mobile with his shrieking bell kept on ringing { there was his son, and the present SM of 3 commando Battalion Haq Nawaz not to overlook Captain Amir , the two odd ladies in adjoining suite and children who were relatively quiet. Nothing concrete came out but it was expected. The old man was more interested in narrating the letters he wrote to General Zia and to Musharraf in controlling the water flowing down the Indus. Regarding old era, he was not very clear but it happens in such cases , first time nothing solid comes out and subsequently the data starts flowing but I doubt in this case yet I took a picture.

Later I came to my guestroom, still fuming as there was no sign of waiter, a typical guest room irritation, he came at 2130 hors, I told him to go and relax as I will get the clothes ironed myself, thus minutes later Mess havildar came, apologised and this is how the matter finished. Net is very slow here, only Jazz and Telenor works here, thus Whatsapp and Viber almost non existent. Another development is the Punjab Rangers, which are now after me to come and write their history and I think now I will have to move next week to Bahawalpur.

Captain Amir, is from 34 Baluch and 3 Commando, he is suffering from blood cancer, recovered but still on the verge, he seems very polite and courteous and well mannered; almost all officers are with few exceptions which is again understandable.

My room is big, it have three rooms excluding washroom, a new construction built upon old construction thus obviously a hoch – poach. These guest rooms are a good indicator of the working mind-set of any formation, it is not how expensive or well decorated the room is, rather it the maintenance of it which reflects the formation. Here at Cherat like any other formation, mess is in poor state, the mess havildar Abid is from 3 commando battalion, the waiters are mostly those soldiers who have been ordered to ‘return to unit’, thus it is temporary arrangements and this is how it has been al these years. My waiter is Faraz he is from Larkana. First night in a new place is always frightful, in Miranshah it was the fear of the Taliban , here it is the reptiles and animals, snakes are quite common so are wild boars. Thus I was quite anxious and quite careful but the night was comfortable. One thing about Cherat, there is no load shedding here, I do not know the reason for this but it is. My room have an air conditioner , although it is not required , the lone window have a sliding door issue so is the commode which shakes.

11<sup>th</sup> August 2016, 2235 hours.

It is dark outside, drizzling started in the evening and now its bit cold too. I have switched off the ceiling fan, first day of fourth and final test at Oval is undergoing, last I saw England were 300 for 9 down , they had won the toss. I am waiting for havildar Kamran who had gone to Peshawar, I gave him the cheque and it has cashed too thus I am able to buy the camera from uncle Toni in Peshawar, D 1200 Canon, all in all it will cost me 45000 rupees quite an amount but for the book it is required.

Yesterday{10<sup>th</sup> August}, I spent in Powindahs, now it seems as if I am part of them. Met Subedar Major Haq Nawaz, a good man, so is the office runner Jawwad who looks too innocent and simple, a young soldier. As the unit is in operational area thus the life in rear is very comfortable and easy, it is somehow the pattern in SSG as a routine. Officers and troops are not teased and pursued by the officers rather an easy life style which has its own good and bad points. The first impression is that none was carrying any kind of weapon, not even the gate sentry. In the past , every soldier of SSG used to carry a dagger on his belt all the time, but now as the belt has been eliminated thus the dagger too has gone. This was symbolic, in Pakistan Army weapon carrying was never a favoured act, it was always seen as an act of operations and not in peacetime,



and amidst all this the SSG was allowed to carry a dagger. Now looking back, one questions as why soldiers were not encouraged to carry weapons, as in police or in frontier corps. Now even that has gone and becomes a part of history.

Captain Amir took me along in a jeep to the ranges, Havildar Qaiser RP was also with us, it is always an apprehension whenever an SSG officer is behind official steering of any vehicle more particularly the Jeep. Not long ago, almost a decade ago, one newly winged SSG officer while driving downward , crashed into the ravine , he was killed and two other soldiers were wounded, reason lack of control over the jeep.

We drove to the firing range which is hardly a kilometre away but before that we stopped at 8 Commando Battalion, where we met Captain Basharat, he is originally from 4 Baluch Regiment and has come back from operational area. Unit's accommodation and office area are all newly constructed, a cadre of combat casualty evacuation was underway, being attended by some thirty odd SSG soldiers, a wastage of effort and manpower as these can be run in each unit and soldiers as such are not away from the regiment. The instructor was not a doctor but an NCO. From the vantage point had a good look at the surrounding areas, later we drove towards the Pond area which is slightly short of the PAF radar site. From this site and position the firing range is

down under, a group of SSG instructors were having tea break right at the firing butt. Years rolled by and the 1986 came into my mind, it was here that we carried out firing in day and also at night, there is an old graveyard next to the firing range and I was keen to see it as I saw it almost three decades ago.

We drove down and walked to the graveyard remnants. Now there is a survival school at the same point; it was not there back then or at least the structure was not there. The school is generally ok, nothing outstanding in it, there are few cages , in one , I saw a snake lying in a trough of water, I did not considered it fit enough to even take a snap. There are few booby traps, made from wood and from own resources, a Machan, and few similar things. Now all this look very impressive on paper and even on ground, but my query to the instructor Havildar Shafiq was, ‘have such things ever been used in the ongoing operations’ and answer was ambiguous, ‘we have caught few animals and birds in swat operation’ but realistically, all these survival techniques have not been used against the Taliban in the North Waziristan, why? The answer lies deep rooted as the fear of the Taliban is as such that these commando battalions or companies have not been employed in the role as per their tactics or training. Who is stopping them? None, all these teachings are for an enemy who recognises the Geneva Convention and not for an enemy

who simply slaughters you, once you are caught, and this changes the overall mind set.

On the way back, Shafiq told me that the snake whom I so underrated is in fact a cobra, he then pushed the snake with a wooden stick and soon Cobra rose to its traditional pose, there is another snake a Viper, being accommodated in same cell, cobra and viper had a bit of wrestling. This is a unique feature of SSG troops and officers that they have no fear of snakes in them, during training the courses are taken to Chor in south where snakes are in abundance, students are given the lure that if they capture a living snake then they can have an evening off to some hours. Fear of snake is a major drag on the efficiency of the soldiers, officers and overall army of any country and anyone who can overcome this primal fear is a lethal warrior.

While we were exploring the Cherat, we three {myself , Captain Amir and Havildar Qaiser,} went to a house which was reportedly occupied by Major Tariq Mahmood in his youth. The house is on an elevation on the northern ridge, we had to climb the stairs, whole area is green but deserted as most of the buildings have been declared dangerous. House is big and deserted, now, a welding plant is operating from here, the structure is not dangerous in true sense but military way of assessing dangerous especially to a building has very low threshold. Scenery from the corner of the house is

breath-taking, as we walked towards the edge, suddenly a wild boar just rushed out and ran away. These pigs are generally un-harmful however if a pregnant or recently born babies are approached by any then the pigs react by rushing towards the intruder, other than that a balance is maintained here, now Captain Amir would just clap his hands before approaching any bush and pigs would get alert , either to run or stay at the place.

In the evening, I just walked towards the church, it was at church which is in the cantonment square and has to be invariably crossed every time one is walking towards mess or going to the office area. At church which has open courtyard, I saw two girls or ladies sitting on wall, it is a rare scene, to see women in Cherat, yes there are army , airforce officers and other ranks living with family, thus they are always seen with respect but these ladies sitting in church , definitely does not belong to that group. I took few snaps of the church , circled around it and it was only then that I saw one of the girls sitting on the wall , she was beautiful in every sense, I was perplexed as how come such beauty is living among the sweepers in Cherat, later I found that these girls came from Peshawar on a church duty. Now this population of Christians enjoys certain rights and privileges and one of them is that church officials from Peshawar often visits Cherat, church is in very good condition, well painted and clean. Havildar Qaiser also

came at the same very moment when I was thinking of asking the ladies for photographs,; I left it and walked with Qaiser.

For next three hours we both walked around Cheart, starting from Mitha Chowk and walking towards the western track, a small road leads upwards ,

14<sup>th</sup> August 2016

Today is Independence Day, it is a great blessing to be born free and in a free country, our country has progressed in last 69 years. Sitting in the mess and there is a English action movie on TV, it is a smart tv with a Wi-Fi connection; Mess is the only place where the net is available.

Cherat is an excellent cantonment, the ridge is laid on north-south direction, thus standing at the vantage points which are also vintage now , the view to the Nowshehra and down to Attock on one direction as viewed from the television booster and on the other direction the city lights of Peshawar are visible too. Thus it is not only a pleasant hill station, it is the most strategic elevated base available on the west of Indus. The same very ridge line on my inquiry, it was told that it leads to Dara Adam Khel and few guerrillas have been going on motorcycle or on foot. From Cherat one can

march down to the Attock Fort as well, it takes a night march and Peshawar is another day march . Thus surprisingly there is no use of Cherat in the ancient or medieval era down to the Sikh rule; even British did not had the full strategic understanding of Cherat ; had that been the case, the entire headquarters of Piffers would have been here. From the past construction, two are most dominating and both are churches, one is catholic, other should logically should have been a protestant, it may be true . These churches and the mountain crests which are engraved here at Cherat , does provide some links to construct a history.

Cherat is a ridge at an elevation of 46661 feet, thick green vegetation, with wild life of wolves, wild boars, jackal, foxes and one odd leopard . british came here in 1861 and established summer camp for the troops but the provincial government did not move here in summer as it was practiced by the Punjab or the Indian officials in pre 1947 era. A hospital was established here which was also part of the church and so was the school . As compare to the Murree where Lawrence established school , no such institution was established here, neither is any hotel here in Cherat to suggest that the public was visiting it; in short Cherat remained obscure; however one British regiment from the engraved crests , it seems was always stationed here. At partition the Armoured Corps Boys corps was

established , now the question arises in which buildings were they housed and what was the routine. Most likely the school was encamped in the old huts and house, but again, none of the convent was established here as in other hill stations. In all these times, regiments acme and marched down after spending their tenure here, but one community which came with the very first regiment , the menials, the untouchables also came and with the period of time they all embraced Christianity, there is no temple in Cherat to suggest that Hindus were also living here. The area of these Christians or the sweepers as they are known, is known as Bazari or the Bazar. This was the original track, the main track of Cherat passing through the bazar or the bazar being coming astride the main track. Cherat being a ridge have only one road , which traverse the ridge , the ridge itself have three knolls, on one is the radar, on the other is the television booster and third one is having assault course.

In 1986, when I came here and now it is a difference of thirty years, quite a lot has changed here, the new mess building, new school building, the new constructed guest rooms or the lodges, the survival school building, the school which is close to Chapri, other than these not much. Water was one of the most serious issue in Cherat, it is resolved to some extent. The water supply is an interesting phenomena. There is no natural spring here to feed the population, British

developed an interesting method, close the end of the knoll on north, they plastered the walls and built two water tanks, thus , all the rain water would just trickle down to these tanks from where through pipes the water was brought to the main mess and bazar. The pipes have broken down other than this the water is still getting in the tanks but none to use it. Presently water is coming up from the Marabba or the Ziarat town, there are three staging stations in between , on my inquiry whether the staging stations have guard or not the answer is bit ambiguous.